COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS

MARTIN LUTHER

Commentary on Galatians

Martin Luther

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About this Book

A landmark of the Reformation, this verse-by-verse exposition of Paul's epistle to the Galatians sets forth **justification by faith alone** with towering clarity and pastoral urgency. Luther distinguishes the **righteousness of the law** from the **passive righteousness of Christ**, shows how the gospel liberates troubled consciences from sin and condemnation, and confronts every form of works-righteousness — Papist, Anabaptist, and Pharisaic alike. Born from Luther's own agonies of conscience, it remains one of history's most powerful defenses of grace.

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Title Page

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A Commentary by Dr. Martin Luther on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians, first collected word for word from his preaching, and now faithfully translated from Latin into English for the general reader.

This work sets forth most excellently the glorious riches of God's grace and the power of the Gospel, along with the distinction between the law and the Gospel and the strength of faith — all declared for the joyful comfort and strengthening of every true Christian believer, especially those who are inwardly afflicted and troubled in conscience and who hunger and thirst for justification in Christ Jesus. It is for their sake above all that this book has been translated, printed, and dedicated.

While you have light, walk in the light. (John 12)

Printed in London by Thomas Vautroullier, dwelling within the Black Friars by Ludgate. With privilege. 1575.

To the Reader

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When this book was brought to me to review and consider, I felt it was my duty not only to approve it for publication but also to commend it to the reader as a work that brings great comfort to all troubled consciences shaped by Christ's school of suffering. The author felt what he spoke and had personal experience of what he wrote, which allowed him to describe both the attacks of the enemy and their remedy — the course of the battle and the means of victory — with vivid clarity. Satan is the enemy, and the victory comes through faith in Christ alone, as John records. If Christ justifies, who can condemn? — as Saint Paul declares. The author has most thoroughly established this essential doctrine in his commentary. Originally written in Latin, certain godly and learned men have translated it faithfully into our language, to the great benefit of all who will read it with humble hearts. Some began the work according to the skill they had. Others, caring deeply about the subject, would not allow such an important work to be handled poorly and lent their hands to frame and advance so worthy a project. They have refused to be named, seeking neither personal gain nor glory, but counting it their hap-

piness if by any means they can relieve troubled minds and do good to the church of Christ — giving all glory to God, to whom all glory belongs.

April 28, 1575. Edwinus London.

To All Afflicted Consciences Which Groan for Salvation and Wrestle Under the Cross for the Kingdom of Christ, Grace, Peace, and Victory in the Lord Jesus Our Savior

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Although everything that could be said in praise of this work cannot be expressed in a few words, we want to briefly convey what may be enough, godly reader: among the many fine English books printed and translated in our day, you will find few in which your time is better spent, your effort better rewarded for your soul's profit, or in which you may see the spirit and voice of Saint Paul more vividly represented, than in a careful reading of this commentary on Saint Paul's epistle to the Galatians. In it, as in a mirror — or rather, as Stephen saw when the heavens opened — you may behold the remarkable glory of the Lord and all the riches of heaven: your salvation freely given through faith in Christ alone, His love and grace toward you fully opened, your victory and conquest in Him fully proved, the wrath of God satisfied, His law fulfilled, the full kingdom of life laid open, death and hell and the gates of hell — however strong they may be — together with all the

power of sin, flesh, and the world defeated, your conscience discharged, all fears and terrors removed, and your inner self so refreshed and set free that either your heart must be heavier than lead, or the reading of this book will lift you above yourself and reveal to you things about Christ Jesus that you will say you never knew before — even if you thought you knew Him well.

This book contains such spiritual comfort, such heavenly doctrine, such firsthand experience and practice of conscience, such triumph over Satan and all his infernal power, such a sweeping view of law compared with the Gospel, and such a holy pride and exaltation of the believing person — whom Luther here makes a divine being: son of God, heir of the whole earth, conqueror of the world, of sin, of death, and of the devil — with such phrases and expressions of high contemplation regarding Christ, grace, justification, and faith (which faith, he says, transforms a man into Christ and joins him to Christ more closely than a husband is joined to his wife, and makes a man more than a man) — with such other mighty voices, full of spiritual glory and majesty, as no writer since the apostles' time has lightly used, and which Luther himself would never have dared to use had not profound experience and the testing of conscience through deep inward conflict and spiritual anguish shaped him for it and given him both this knowledge of the Spirit and this boldness of speech.

This is commonly how God works and calls: He always brings about the most excellent things by their opposites — from unbelief He creates faith, from poverty He creates riches, in misery He shows mercy, turning sorrow into comfort, mourning into joy, advancing from affliction to glory, bringing from hell to heaven, from death to life, from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, giv-

ing water in the wilderness, making the barren fruitful, and creating out of nothing all things that exist. God began to work this way at the very start, and He has continued and will continue to do so to the end of the world. The first seed of promise after Eve was given to Sarah — yet what was Sarah's condition before she received the promise? And in what barrenness and despair was she before she enjoyed her beloved Isaac? The same could be said of the two mothers of two most excellent children — Samuel and John the Baptist — and yet what grief and sorrow passed through their hearts, both being beyond all natural hope, before God's goodness acted. How long did the patriarch Jacob serve in miserable bondage for his Rachel? In what excellent glory was Joseph ultimately raised? Yet what did he suffer first at the hands of his brothers, and how long was his imprisonment? In what long servitude were the sons of Israel before Moses was sent to them? And afterward, in what desperate straits were they surrounded on every side — until the sea itself was compelled to make way for them? After that again, what an excellent land was promised and given to them, flowing with milk and honey! But how were they tested in the desert before they received it — and even then, it was not they but their children who entered the land! To pass over much else, what an excellent work it was for God to establish David in his kingdom! And what glorious promises were given to his throne! Yet how narrowly did he escape with his life? How did the Lord humble and shape him before placing him in peace? It would take forever to recount it all. In short, throughout all God's works it is plain to see: He always brings about the most excellent things through the most humble instruments — through those who seem furthest from the goal. Which of the apostles ever thought, when

Christ was so humbled and crucified on the cross, that they would ever see Him again? Even though He had told them beforehand about His resurrection — so much so that Thomas could scarcely believe even when he saw Him with his own eyes. What man would ever have imagined that Paul, in the raging heat of his persecuting fury, would turn from a persecutor into such a confessor of the faith? From such unbelief to such faith? Ananias himself could scarcely believe the Lord when He told him. Such is the power of the Lord our God — always working, especially through opposites, and most powerfully when He has some excellent thing to bring about for His own glory.

In the same way we may consider Martin Luther, who began as a friar — his history records, and this book partly describes, just how deep he was sunk in blindness, superstition, and darkness, in the dreams and dregs of monkish idolatry. His religion consisted entirely of popish ceremonies; his zeal was without understanding; he knew no justification except through works of the law and merits of his own making; he believed only the historical facts of Christ's death and resurrection (as many do), without knowing their power and significance. After he had continued in this way for a long time — more rigidly devoted to these monkish practices than the average member of his order — it pleased almighty God to begin working in him: first by touching his conscience with some awareness and feeling of sin, and his mind with fears and doubts, which drove him to seek further understanding. By searching, seeking, conferring with others, and by reading Saint Paul, small sparks of better knowledge began to appear little by little, which in time grew into greater light. But here the same thing happened to him that commonly happens to all good Christians: the more the

true knowledge of Christ grew in him, the more Satan the enemy stirred up his attacks — with doubts and objections, with false fears and subtle assaults, seeking by every possible means to crush the inward soul that longed to find its rest in Christ. How severely he was troubled in these spiritual conflicts and inward wrestlings, fighting against unbelief, error, and despair, is remarkable to consider. At one point he lay on his bed for three days and three nights without food, drink, or sleep, like a dead man — as some writers report — laboring in soul and spirit over a particular passage of Saint Paul in the third chapter of Romans: "Ad ostendendam iustitiam suam" — that is, "to show his justice" — thinking Christ was sent for no other purpose than to display God's justice as an enforcer of the law, until at length the Lord answered and satisfied him regarding the true meaning of those words — that God's justice was executed upon His Son to save us from its penalty. Immediately upon receiving that understanding, he sprang up from his bed, so confirmed in faith that nothing could shake him afterward. Beyond this, he endured many other severe temptations of every kind — with the sole exception of greed, a vice by which, as those who lived with him testify, he was never once tempted or touched.

Meanwhile, during these conflicts and trials of Luther — which, however, did him no harm but rather advanced his spiritual knowledge — Pope Leo X sent out a Jubilee with his pardons throughout all Christian kingdoms and territories, by which he gathered enormous riches and treasure. The collectors of those funds promised anyone who put ten shillings in the box a license to eat white meat and flesh during Lent, the power to deliver any soul he chose from purgatory, and complete pardon from all his

sins, no matter how terrible. But if the payment was even one coin short of ten shillings, they preached that it would profit him nothing. The abuse was so horrifying that when no other man dared speak, Luther could not in good conscience remain silent. He drew up certain articles and calmly requested a debate on the matter, at the same time writing a most humble letter to the Pope, submitting himself in the most lowly manner to his judgment. But the Pope, thinking it great dishonor to be challenged by such a friar, reacted so hotly that he, along with all his cardinals, the entire rabble of monks and friars, bishops and archbishops, colleges and universities, kings and princes, and the emperor himself, all turned against Luther. If the almighty providence of the Lord from above had not sustained him, what could one poor friar have done against such fierce attacks of Satan, such violence from the whole world — having no less than the sun, the moon, and seven stars (as they say) against him? He was hated by men, assailed by devils, rejected by nations, formally condemned by authority, weakened by illness, and tested by every kind of temptation. And yet through all these temptations, his life was such that — as Erasmus affirmed in a letter to Cardinal Wolsey — none of his enemies could ever charge him with any justifiable fault. Moreover, his use of Scripture was such that Roffensis, writing to Erasmus, confesses he was astonished by it.

This much by way of preface regarding the conflicts and trials of this man. We thought it worthwhile to mention these things to the Christian reader for several reasons. First, to note the merciful kindness of Christ our Savior in calling so superstitious and idolatrous a friar so graciously into such a light of His Gospel — His grace in justifying Luther, His power in preserving him, His help in

comforting him, His glory in prospering him: one man against so many, and prospering him so thoroughly that the whole power of the Papacy could neither withstand him nor maintain itself against him. Second, so that the reader, considering the remarkable way the Lord worked in this man, may more readily trust the doctrine he teaches. Although his teaching on one small point regarding the sacrament cannot be fully defended, this is no great surprise in a man who was occupied with weightier matters of religion and had no time to thoroughly investigate that question. Nor should that imperfection cast doubt on all the rest — which he taught so soundly regarding the weightier principles and foundations of Christ's Gospel and our justification by faith in Christ alone. Even on the matter of the sacrament, though he differs somewhat from Zuinglius by staying too close to the letter, he does not go so far with the papists as to leave any transubstantiation or idolatry in his view. Since the matter is no greater than that, and does not directly contradict any article of our creed, let us not be so particular as to throw away the whole body for one small blemish. It would certainly be desirable if good teachers and preachers of Christ had no defect or imperfection. But whoever can tolerate no blemish, let him — if he can — name any doctor or writer, whether Greek or Latin, ancient or modern, from any part of the world, or himself for that matter, who has not erred in some statement or some interpretation of Holy Scripture. If he cannot do that, then let him learn, as he would have others bear with him, to take the best and leave the worst — though in this particular book there is nothing of the kind to fear, since we, with concern for the simple reader, have deliberately removed and omitted the few stumbling points that might cause offense. Let him give thanks to God for whatever is

good — and especially for this: what God has given us through Luther in so excellently opening to us His grace, mercy, and goodwill through His Son. For if Luther had not so plainly, so fully, and so confidently taught the distinction between law and Gospel and set before us our justification, victory, and liberty by faith in Christ alone, who would ever have dared open his mouth to speak in such terms or to stand so boldly in this doctrine of faith and grace? Indeed, even after Luther so mightily taught that works are not necessary for salvation, there have been and still are some who openly defend that they are — so what would these people have taught if Luther had never lived? Luther himself warned us of this, prophesying that after his time the doctrine of justification would be nearly extinguished in the church — as experience in certain places has already begun to show.

Therefore, as much as the Lord gives us grace, let us hold firmly to the comforting doctrine of faith and justification, and not lose what the Lord has so freely given. Let us call upon the Lord with all obedience and diligence to grant us grace — along with Saint Paul — not to refuse the grace He freely offers, and not to be offended by this joyful doctrine, as so many are. As it was our duty to spread this doctrine abroad, so it is equally our counsel to every diligent reader: pray for grace to rightly understand what you read. For unless the special grace of Christ helps, it is hard for flesh and blood to grasp this mysterious doctrine of faith alone. It is so foreign to natural reason, so dark to the world, and has so many enemies that unless God's Spirit reveals it from above, learning cannot reach it, wisdom is offended by it, nature is astonished at it, devils do not know it, and men persecute it. In short, there is no path to life so easy, and yet none so hard — easy for those to whom it is

given from above, hard for the natural mind not yet inspired. Ignorance of this doctrine is the root of all errors, sects, and divisions, not only throughout Christendom but throughout the whole world. The Jew thinks to be saved by the law of Moses, the Muslim by his Quran, the philosopher by his moral virtues. Beyond these, there is another sort of people — not as far gone as the Jew, nor as pagan as the philosopher — who do not entirely reject the name of Christ, but who combine Christ with part of the law of Moses, part of the moral and natural discipline of philosophy, and part of their own ceremonies and traditions, to construct their own path to heaven. These are called papists in this commentary — after the Pope, their founder — themselves divided into more than a hundred different sects, orders, and professions: Cardinals, Friars, Monks, Nuns, Priests, Hermits, and other devoted religious groups. All of these seem to arise from no other cause than ignorance of this doctrine. No wonder — for take away the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ, and leave a man to his own inventions, and there will be no end to new schemes. It is a dangerous thing to err at the very foundation: the higher you build on it, the greater the fall. And yet such builders are not without their arguments to prop up their system of works against this doctrine of justifying faith, citing the testimony of Saint James, who appears to attribute justification to works rather than to faith alone.

Since the author has discussed the matter of justification at length in the body of this work, there is no need to say much about it here. This brief note in the preface will be enough to advise the Christian reader who wishes to read this book with profit and sound judgment: two things are especially required. First, read it from beginning to end, not in scattered pieces here and there, but

in order as it stands, comparing one passage with another — this will help you better understand the author's true meaning: how and in what sense he sets aside good works, and in what sense he does not; how he seems to neglect the law, and how he magnifies it. For when it comes to justification before God, the free promise of the Gospel admits no condition but faith alone in Christ Jesus. But when it comes to the duty of obedience, Luther excludes no good works — rather, he urges them in many places. These two matters and the circumstances belonging to each must be carefully distinguished.

The second thing required of the reader who wishes to benefit from this book is to bring to the reading the same kind of mind the author brought to his preaching — that is, his spiritual senses must be somewhat trained through inward conflict, and he must have been genuinely humbled by the fear of God and true repentance. Without this, he will scarcely grasp the excellent sweetness of this writer or of any other like him. For although it is very true that no greater comfort to the human soul can be found in any book outside of Holy Scripture than in this commentary by Luther, yet that comfort has little place except where a troubled conscience is in need of the physician's hand. Those who feel themselves spiritually healthy and have no inward sorrow care little for such books, and when they read them they understand little of this doctrine. This is why, in my view, the Pope and his papists feel so little and like so little of Luther's doctrine — they are rarely ever deeply troubled in spirit by any serious affliction, but instead mock those who are beaten down by the conflicts and temptations of Satan. They did the same to Luther — because God allowed him to be tested and tried by the enemy's blows, they said he learned his divinity from

the devil. But how he actually learned it, let us hear from Luther himself, who writes in this book: "Unless we had been exercised with violence and cunning assaults by tyrants and heretics, and in our hearts with fears and fiery darts of the devil, Paul would have been no less obscure to us than he was in former times to the whole world — and still is to this day to our opponents the papists, the Anabaptists, and other adversaries. Therefore the gift of understanding Scripture, and our studies through such inward and outward conflicts, open to us the mind of Paul and of all the Scriptures."

But let these ignorant papists, whoever they may be, taste a little of what Luther experienced — then see what they say. Experience is the proof. How many of them do we see who, for all their private confession — which fills them with false security — yet at the point of death, when death stands on one side and God's justice on the other, mostly either despair, or else, abandoning all other supports, cling solely to faith and the blood of Christ Jesus. Many of them, in the end, are glad to die as Lutherans — however much they hated Luther in life. What shall we then say of Luther's doctrine? If papists themselves are glad to die in it, why are they unwilling to live in it? And if it is true at one moment, how can the passage of time make false what was once true?

Those who so boldly resist the doctrine of justification by faith alone are badly mistaken. As for their appeal to Saint James — that is easily answered once we rightly understand what James and Paul each mean. James speaks of a person's righteousness before men — that is, good works as the visible demonstration of true faith, proving to other people that one is a genuine believer, rather than describing the act of justification before God. So what James

says is true: faith without works does not justify — but his purpose is not to tell us what makes a person righteous before God. Rather, he declares that good works are necessarily present in a person who has been justified by faith. Paul, on the other hand, speaks of righteousness and justification not before men but before God — and his purpose is not to exclude good works from true faith, as though they should not be done, but to teach us where the true foundation and hope of our salvation must rest: in faith alone. So what Paul says is equally true: faith alone, without works, justifies.

To better understand Saint Paul's statement and to reconcile it with Saint James, one important point must be noted for the benefit of those who raise objections: Paul's statement must be taken in its full meaning, matching the right subject with the right predicate — as the scholastic theologians would say. That is, faith in Christ as justifying must always be understood in relation to the truly repentant and sorrowing sinner. Understood this way, the statement is completely true: faith alone, without works, justifies. But whom does it justify? The worldly person? The reckless lawbreaker? The pleasure-seeking person who lives only for indulgence? The person who claims the Gospel while living carnally? Paul means none of these. He means only the mourning and laboring soul, the troubled conscience, the repentant heart, the sinner who is turning from his ways. In such a person the statement is true, according to Paul's teaching: "To the one who believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." Conversely, let that same faith be considered in relation to the stubborn and willful rebel who, against his own conscience, continues and delights in sin — and then what James says is equally true: "not by faith only." James means that faith does not result in

justification except in those who have a genuine will and purpose to amend their lives. Not that repentance and turning from sin saves them, but that faith in Christ works justification only in those who truly repent and are willing to change. So the command "Believe the Gospel" always goes together with "Repent and amend." Not that repentance saves a sinner from the law's penalty, but that it identifies the person in whom faith in Christ alone does save and justify.

But enough of this — more than is strictly necessary — especially since the book itself will fully satisfy the reader on all such questions. And so, ceasing to detain you, gentle reader, with any longer preface: as we commend this good work to your devout study, so we commend both you and your study to the grace of Christ Jesus the Son of God, sincerely wishing and asking of His majesty that you may receive no less profit and comfort from reading it than our purpose was to bring you good in setting it before you — which the Lord grant. Amen.

The Preface of Martin Luther upon the Epistle to the Galatians

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I can hardly believe I spoke at such length when I publicly expounded this epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians, as this book suggests I did. Nevertheless, I recognize all the thoughts I find gathered with such great care by my brothers — they are mine, and I must confess that all or perhaps even more was spoken by me in that public lecture. For one article rules in my heart: faith in Christ. To Him, from Him, through Him, and back to Him, all my theological study flows day and night, constantly. And yet I perceive that I have never come close to the height, breadth, and depth of such high and immeasurable wisdom — only bare and poor beginnings, mere fragments, appear in what I have produced. Therefore I am ashamed that such barren and simple commentaries should be published on so worthy an apostle and chosen vessel of God. But when I consider again the infinite and terrible abuses and corrupt practices that have always raged in the church of God — and still rage today against the one sure foundation we hold: the article of justification (that is, that not by ourselves, nor by our works which are worth less than we are, but by another's

help — the Son of God, Jesus Christ — we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil, and made partakers of eternal life) — I am compelled to cast off all shame and speak with the utmost boldness.

Satan shook this foundation in paradise when he persuaded our first parents that by their own wisdom and power they could be like God — causing them to abandon true faith in God, who had given them life and promised its continuation. Immediately after, this liar and murderer — true to his own nature — stirred up one brother to murder the other, and for no other reason than that Abel, by faith, had offered a more excellent sacrifice, while Cain, offering his own works without faith, had not pleased God. After this, Satan launched a fierce persecution through the sons of Cain against this same faith, until God was compelled to purge the whole world by flood and to protect Noah, the preacher of righteousness. Even so, Satan continued his influence through Ham, Noah's third son. But who could enumerate every example? After these events, the whole world went mad against this faith, inventing an endless number of idols and false religions, by which everyone — as Saint Paul says — walked his own way, each hoping by his works to pacify or please some god or goddess. That is, they sought without the help of Christ, and by their own works, to redeem themselves from evil and from sin — as the records and monuments of all nations plainly witness.

But all of this is nothing compared to what happened among God's own people, Israel — who had not only the sure promises made to the patriarchs and afterward the law given directly by God through His angels, above all other nations, but who were also continually confirmed by the living words, miracles, and examples

of the prophets. Yet even among them, Satan prevailed — that is, the insane and arrogant opinion of their own righteousness — so powerfully that they eventually killed all the prophets, and indeed Christ Himself, the Son of God and their promised Messiah, because He taught that people are received into God's favor by grace alone and not by their own righteousness. And this is the core of the devil's and the world's doctrine from the beginning: "We will not appear to do evil — but whatever we do, God must approve, and all His prophets must agree. If they refuse, they will die." Abel shall die, but Cain shall flourish. "This is our law," they say — and so it comes to pass.

But in the church of the Gentiles, the matter has been handled so violently that the fury of the Jewish synagogue looks mild by comparison. The Jews, as Saint Paul says, did not recognize Christ as their anointed and therefore crucified the Lord of glory. But the church of the Gentiles received and confessed Christ to be the Son of God, made our righteousness — and she publicly records, reads, and teaches this. And yet despite this confession, those who claim to be the church kill and persecute and constantly rage against those who believe, teach, and demonstrate in their lives nothing other than what the persecutors themselves — though in pretended words and hypocritical deeds — are compelled against their will to approve and confess. For they reign today under the name of Christ. And if they could hold their seat and power without His name, there is no doubt they would openly declare what they secretly think of Him. They regard Him far less than even the Jews do — who at least consider Him to have been a criminal justly

hanged on the cross. But these men treat Him as a myth and a fictional deity borrowed from the Gentiles — as is plainly evident in Rome, in the papal court, and throughout much of Italy.

Because Christ has been made into a mockery among those who call themselves Christians — and because Cain keeps killing Abel, and Satan's corruption now reigns most powerfully — it is very necessary that we diligently defend this article and hold it up against Satan, whether we are plain or eloquent, learned or unlearned. For this rock must be proclaimed everywhere — even if every human voice were silenced, the very rocks and stones would cry out. Therefore I most willingly fulfill my duty here and am content to allow this lengthy and wordy commentary to be published, for the purpose of rousing all brothers in Christ against the cunning and malice of Satan. In these days Satan has turned to such extreme madness against the saving knowledge of Christ, now revealed and restored, that as formerly men seemed possessed by devils, now the very devils seem possessed by something far worse and rage beyond ordinary devilish fury. This is itself a strong sign that the enemy of truth and life perceives the day of judgment to be at hand — the dreadful day of his destruction, but the most comforting day of our redemption, when all his tyranny and cruelty will end. He is not without reason disturbed when his forces and strongholds are under such attack — like a thief or an adulterer caught in the act when morning exposes his wickedness. For who has ever heard — setting aside the pope's abominations — so many monstrous errors burst into the world all at once, as we see today in the Anabaptists alone? Through them, Satan seems to be breathing out the last gasp of his kingdom, driving them into such violent upheaval everywhere that he appears to want, through

their hands, not only to destroy the whole world with sedition, but to swallow up Christ and His church entirely with a flood of endless sects.

Against the lives and opinions of others he does not rage in this way — not against fornicators, thieves, murderers, perjurers, rebels against God, unbelievers. To these he rather gives peace and quiet. He maintains them in his service with all manner of pleasures and delights and gives them everything they want — just as in the earliest days of the church he not only allowed all the idolatries and false religions of the world to go undisturbed, but powerfully maintained, defended, and nourished them. The church and the religion of Christ alone he attacked from every side. Afterward, allowing peace and quiet to many heretics, he troubled only the sound, universal doctrine. Even so today he has no other business than this one — which has always been peculiarly his own: to persecute and attack our Savior Christ, who is our perfect righteousness apart from our works. As it is written of him: "You shall bruise his heel."

I do not set forth these reflections so much against these men as for my brothers, who will either show themselves grateful to the Lord for my labor, or at least excuse my weakness and boldness. I have no desire for the wicked to approve or accept what I write. Rather, I would wish that both they and their god might be further irritated by it — since all my hard work is devoted to those for whom Saint Paul wrote this epistle: the troubled, afflicted, harassed, tempted, and spiritually struggling — for they alone truly understand these things — the Galatians in the faith. Whoever is not in such a condition, let them listen to the papists, monks, Anabaptists, and other teachers of deep worldly wisdom and self-

devised religion, and let them boldly despise our doctrine and our work. For today the papists and Anabaptists are united against the church on this one point — though they disguise it in their words — that God's work depends on the worthiness of the person. The Anabaptists teach: baptism is nothing unless the person believes. From this principle it necessarily follows that all of God's works are nothing if the man is nothing. But baptism is God's work, and yet a wicked man does not make it cease to be God's work. Furthermore, by this reasoning marriage, authority, freedom, and bondage are God's works — but because people are sinful, they are therefore not God's works. Wicked people have the sun, the moon, the earth, the water, the air, and all other creatures at their service — but because they are wicked and not godly, the sun is not the sun, and the moon, earth, and water are not what they are. The Anabaptists themselves had bodies and souls before they were re-baptized — but because they were not godly, they therefore did not have true bodies and souls. Also, their parents were not lawfully married — as they themselves admit — because they were not re-baptized. Therefore the Anabaptists themselves are all illegitimate, and their parents were all adulterers and fornicators — and yet the Anabaptists do inherit their parents' lands and goods, even while admitting themselves to be illegitimate and unlawful heirs. Who does not see in the Anabaptists, not men possessed by devils, but very devils themselves possessed by worse devils?

The papists likewise still insist on works and human worthiness against grace — and so in their words at least they firmly back their brothers the Anabaptists. For these foxes are tied together by the tails, however much their heads may seem to face in opposite directions. Outwardly they pose as each other's great enemies,

while inwardly they think, teach, and in practice defend the very same thing against our Savior Christ, who alone is our righteousness. Therefore, let whoever is able hold fast to this one article, and let us allow the rest who have made shipwreck of it to be carried wherever the sea and winds drive them — until they either return to the ship or swim to the shore.

The conclusion of this complaint is to expect no quietness and no end to complaint as long as Christ and Belial do not agree. One generation passes and another comes. When one heresy dies, another immediately springs up — for the devil neither slumbers nor sleeps. I myself — though I am nothing — have been in the ministry of Christ for about twenty years, and I can truly testify that I have been attacked by more than twenty sects, some of which are already destroyed, while others, like the parts of a cut worm or bee, still twitch with life. But Satan, the god of all division, stirs up new sects every day — and last of all he has raised up one that I never would have foreseen or suspected: a sect that teaches that the Ten Commandments ought to be removed from the church, and that people should not be confronted with the law but gently urged by the preaching of Christ's grace, so that the word of the prophet Micah might be fulfilled: "Let no one rebuke or reprove another; they shall not prophesy to these people." As though we did not know, or had never taught, that broken and crushed spirits must be comforted by Christ — while the hard-hearted Pharisees, to whom the grace of God is preached in vain, must be confronted by the law. Even these antinomian teachers are forced to devise certain revelations of God's wrath against the wicked and unbelievers. As though the law were or could be anything other than a revealing of God's wrath against ungodliness. Such is the blindness and

pride of these men, who by their own logic condemn themselves. Therefore God's ministers must be firmly convinced — if they wish to be found faithful and wise on the day of Christ — that Saint Paul's words are not spoken in vain when he says there must be heresies, so that those who are genuine may be recognized. Indeed, let the minister of Christ know: as long as he teaches Christ purely, there will never be a shortage of perverse spirits — even from within our own ranks — who will seek by every means possible to trouble the church of Christ. Let him take comfort in this: there is no peace between Christ and Belial, between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Indeed, let him rejoice in the troubles brought on by these sects and troublesome spirits, rising one after another. For this is our joy — the testimony of our conscience that we are found standing and fighting on the side of the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent. Let the serpent bite us at the heel and spare nothing. We in turn will not stop crushing his head, by the grace and help of Christ, the chief crusher of it — who is blessed forever.

Text

FINIS.

The Argument of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians

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We must first speak of the argument of this epistle — that is, what subject Saint Paul is chiefly treating. The argument is this.

Saint Paul works to establish the doctrine of faith, grace, forgiveness of sins, and Christian righteousness, so that we may have a clear and thorough understanding of the difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness. There are several kinds of righteousness. There is a political or civil righteousness, which emperors, worldly rulers, philosophers, and lawyers deal with. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which is taught by human traditions. This ceremonial righteousness parents and teachers may safely teach, because they do not claim it has any power to pay for sin, to please God, or to earn grace — they teach such customs only as are useful for shaping behavior and maintaining order in this life. Besides these, there is the righteousness of the law, or of the Ten Commandments, which Moses teaches. We teach this kind of righteousness as well, in its proper place after the doctrine of faith.

There is yet another righteousness above all these: the righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, which we must carefully distinguish from the others just mentioned. These other forms of righteousness are completely opposite to Christian righteousness — they flow from the laws of emperors, the traditions of the pope, and the commandments of God, and they all consist in our own works, accomplished either by our natural ability (as the scholastic theologians call it) or by God's enabling gift. For these forms of righteousness are also gifts of God, like the other good things we enjoy.

But this most excellent righteousness — the righteousness of faith — which God imputes to us through Christ apart from works, is neither political, nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor does it consist in works. It is the direct opposite of all these: it is a purely passive righteousness, while all the others are active. In this righteousness we do nothing, we contribute nothing to God — we only receive, and allow Another to work in us, namely God. This is why I prefer to call the righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, the passive righteousness.

This is a righteousness hidden in mystery, which the world does not know. Even Christians themselves do not fully understand it and can barely hold on to it when they are tested. Therefore it must be diligently taught and constantly put into practice. Whoever fails to grasp this righteousness in times of affliction and terror of conscience will inevitably fall into despair. For there is no comfort for the conscience so firm and sure as this passive righteousness.

But human weakness and misery are so great that in moments of terror of conscience and nearness to death, we see nothing but our own works, our own worthiness, and the law. When the law shows us our sin, the memory of our past evil life rushes back. Then the poor sinner groans in great anguish of spirit and thinks: "How desperately I have lived! If only God would give me more time — then I would amend my life." Human reason cannot stop itself from looking at this active, working righteousness — its own righteousness — and cannot lift its eyes to behold the passive, Christian righteousness. It rests entirely in the active righteousness. So deeply is this tendency rooted in us.

On the other side, Satan takes advantage of our natural weakness and increases and intensifies these thoughts within us. The poor conscience then cannot avoid being more deeply troubled, confused, and terrified. For it is impossible for the human mind on its own to find any comfort or to look up to grace alone when it is overwhelmed by the horror of sin, or to consistently set aside all reasoning about works. This is far beyond human strength and capacity — indeed, it is beyond even the law of God. The law is the most excellent thing in all the world, and yet it cannot bring peace to a troubled conscience. Instead, it multiplies terror and drives the conscience toward despair. For by the law, sin becomes exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13).

Therefore, the afflicted and troubled conscience has no escape from despair and eternal death unless it lays hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, freely offered in Christ Jesus — that is, this passive righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness. If it can grasp this, then it may find peace and boldly say: "I am not looking for this active, working righteousness — though I know I ought to

have it and fulfill it. Even if I had it and fulfilled it perfectly, I still could not trust in it or dare set it against the judgment of God." So I abandon all active righteousness — both my own and that of God's law — and embrace only this passive righteousness: the righteousness of grace, mercy, and forgiveness of sins. In short, I rest solely on the righteousness of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the earth does not produce rain and is unable by its own strength, labor, or effort to obtain it — but receives it as a free gift from God above — so this heavenly righteousness is given to us by God without our works or deserving. The earth can do nothing on its own to secure the seasonable rains that make it fruitful — and we can do exactly that much, and no more, by our own strength and works to obtain this heavenly and eternal righteousness. We will never attain it unless God Himself bestows it on us by free imputation and by His unspeakable gift. Therefore the highest knowledge and greatest wisdom for Christians is not to know the law, to be done with works and all active righteousness — especially when the conscience is wrestling with the judgment of God. In contrast, among those who are not of God's people, the greatest point of wisdom is to know and to press the law and active righteousness earnestly.

It is something very strange and unknown to the world to teach Christians to be done with the law and to live before God as if there were no law. But unless you have set the law aside and are firmly persuaded in your heart that there is now no law and no wrath of God — but only grace and mercy through Christ — you cannot be saved, because it is by the law that sin comes to be known. On the other hand, works and the keeping of the law must be strictly required in the world as if there were no promise or grace — because

of the stubborn, proud, and hard-hearted, before whose eyes nothing must be set but the law, so that they may be terrified and humbled. For the law is given to terrify and put to death the old man. Both the word of grace and the word of wrath must be rightly divided, according to what the apostle says in 2 Timothy 2:15.

What is needed here is a wise and faithful steward of God's word — one who can handle the law with such skill that it stays within its proper bounds. Whoever teaches that people are justified before God by observing the law has overstepped the law's bounds and confused these two kinds of righteousness — active and passive — and is a poor logician, because he does not rightly divide. In contrast, whoever applies the law and works to the old man, and the promise of forgiveness and God's mercy to the new man, handles the word well. The flesh, or old man, belongs with the law and works; the spirit, or new man, belongs with God's promise and His mercy. So when I see a person who is already crushed, oppressed by the law, terrified by sin, and longing for comfort, it is time to remove the law and active righteousness from before them and to set before them, through the Gospel, the Christian and passive righteousness. This righteousness, setting aside Moses and the law, offers the promise made in Christ, who came for the afflicted and for sinners. Here the person is lifted up again and conceives fresh hope. He is no longer under the law but under grace. How is he not under the law? In terms of the new man, the law does not apply. For the law only extends as far as Christ, as Paul says later: "The law lasts until Christ" — and once Christ has come, Moses ceases with his law, circumcision, the sacrifices, the sabbaths, and indeed all the prophets.

This is our theology: to distinguish clearly between these two kinds of righteousness, active and passive, so that conduct and faith, works and grace, civil life and religion are not confused or mixed together. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their proper bounds. Christian righteousness belongs to the new man, and the righteousness of the law belongs to the old man, who is born of flesh and blood. The old man is like a donkey that must bear a burden pressing him down. He must not enjoy the freedom of the spirit or of grace unless he first puts on the new man by faith in Christ — which, however, is never fully accomplished in this life. Then he may enjoy the kingdom and the immeasurable gift of grace.

I say this so that no one should think we reject or forbid good works, as the papists falsely slander us — understanding neither what they themselves say nor what we teach. They know nothing but the righteousness of the law, yet they presume to judge a doctrine that far surpasses the law — and no natural person is capable of judging it rightly. They must inevitably be offended, for they cannot see beyond the law. Whatever lies above the law is a great offense to them. But we think of two worlds, as it were: one heavenly, and one earthly. In these we place the two kinds of righteousness, keeping them entirely separate from each other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and deals with earthly things, and by it we do good works. But just as the earth does not yield fruit unless it is first watered and made fruitful from above, so by the righteousness of the law, in doing many things we accomplish nothing, and in fulfilling the law we do not truly fulfill it — unless we are first, without any merit or work of our own, made righteous by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the right-

eousness of the law or earthly, active righteousness. Christian righteousness is heavenly: we do not have it from ourselves but receive it from heaven. We do not produce it by working — it is worked in us by grace and received by faith, by which we rise above all laws and works. Therefore, as we have borne the image of the earthly Adam (as Saint Paul says), so let us bear the image of the heavenly one — the new man in a new world where there is no law, no sin, no guilt of conscience, no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, life, salvation, and glory.

But then, do we do nothing? Do we contribute nothing toward obtaining this righteousness? I answer: nothing at all. For this is the perfect righteousness — to do nothing, hear nothing, know nothing of the law or of works, but to know and believe only this: that Christ has gone to the Father and is no longer seen; that He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven — not as a judge, but as the One God has made for us wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption; in short, that He is our great High Priest, interceding for us, and reigning over us and within us by grace. In this heavenly righteousness sin has no place, because there is no law, and where there is no law there can be no transgression.

Since sin has no place in this righteousness, there can be no anguish of conscience, no fear, no heaviness of spirit. This is why Saint John says: "He who is born of God does not sin." But if there is any fear or grief of conscience, it is a sign that this righteousness has been withdrawn, that grace is hidden from view, and that Christ is obscured and not truly seen. But where Christ is truly seen, there must be full and perfect joy in the Lord, with peace of conscience — peace that says with confidence: "Although I am a sinner by the law, and under the law's condemnation, I do not de-

spair, I do not die, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my everlasting life. In that righteousness and life, I have no sin, no fear, no sting of conscience, no dread of death. I am indeed a sinner in this present life, and in the righteousness of this life, as a child of Adam — where the law accuses me, death reigns over me, and will at last swallow me. But I have another righteousness and life above this life, which is Christ the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is righteousness and eternal life. Through Him my body, though dead and turned to dust, will be raised up again, freed from the bondage of law and sin, and sanctified together with my spirit."

So both of these continue as long as we live here. The flesh is accused, tried by temptations, weighed down by heaviness and sorrow, crushed by the active righteousness of the law. But the spirit reigns, rejoices, and is saved by this passive and Christian righteousness, knowing that it has a Lord in heaven at the right hand of the Father — who has abolished the law, sin, and death, has trampled all evils underfoot, led them captive, and triumphed over them in Himself (Colossians 2:15).

Therefore in this epistle Saint Paul diligently works to instruct us, to comfort us, and to keep us in a thorough knowledge of this most excellent Christian righteousness. For if the article of justification is once lost, all true Christian doctrine is lost with it. Everyone in the world who does not hold this doctrine is either a Jew, a Muslim, a papist, or a heretic. There is no middle ground between the righteousness of the law and Christian righteousness. Whoever departs from Christian righteousness must fall into the righteousness of the law — that is, having lost Christ, he must fall back on confidence in his own works.

This is why we repeat and so earnestly set forth this doctrine of faith, or Christian righteousness — so that it may be kept in constant exercise and plainly distinguished from the active righteousness of the law. Otherwise we will never be able to hold true theology — for the church is built on this one doctrine and exists within it — but will quickly become canonists, observers of ceremonies, observers of the law, or papists, and Christ will be so obscured that no one in the church is either rightly taught or comforted. Therefore, if we are to be teachers and leaders of others, we must take great care with these matters and mark well this distinction between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of Christ. This distinction is easy enough to express in words, but very hard to maintain in practice and experience — however diligently it may be practiced — because in the hour of death or in other agonies of conscience, these two kinds of righteousness press in against each other more closely than you would wish. Therefore I urge you — especially those who will become instructors and guides of consciences, but also every individual — to exercise yourselves continually through study, reading, meditation on the word, and prayer, so that when temptation comes you may be able to instruct and comfort both your own conscience and the consciences of others, and to lead them from the law to grace, from active and working righteousness to passive and received righteousness — in short, from Moses to Christ. For the devil's habit in times of affliction and conflict of conscience is to use the law to frighten us and to hold before us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that by this means he may drive us to desperation, make us his slaves, and tear us away from Christ. He is also in the habit of setting before us

those passages of the Gospel where Christ Himself requires works and plainly threatens damnation on those who do not do them. If at this point we cannot distinguish between the two kinds of righteousness — if we do not lay hold of Christ by faith as He sits at the right hand of God, interceding to the Father for us miserable sinners — then we are under the law and not under grace, and Christ is no longer a Savior but a lawgiver. Then there remains nothing but desperation and everlasting death, unless repentance follows.

Let us therefore carefully learn to distinguish between these two kinds of righteousness, so that we may know how far we ought to obey the law. As we said earlier, the law in a Christian must not exceed its proper bounds — it must have authority only over the flesh, which is subject to it and remains under it. When that is the case, the law is kept within its limits. But if it presumes to creep into your conscience and tries to reign there, be a skilled reasoner and make the right distinction. Give the law no more than what properly belongs to it. Say to it: "O law, you are trying to climb into the kingdom of my conscience and reign there and convict it of sin, and you want to take from me the joy that I have by faith in Christ and drive me to desperation, so that I would be utterly without hope and perish. This you are doing beyond your proper function. Stay within your limits and exercise your authority over the flesh — but do not touch my conscience. For I am baptized, and by the Gospel I have been called to share in righteousness and everlasting life, in the kingdom of Christ, where my conscience finds rest — where there is no law, but only forgiveness of sins, peace, quiet, joy, health, and everlasting life. Do not trouble me in these things. I will not suffer you, so intolerable a tyrant and cruel tormentor, to reign in my conscience. For my conscience is the seat and temple

of Christ the Son of God, who is the King of righteousness and peace, and my most gracious Savior and Mediator. He will keep my conscience joyful and at peace in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the knowledge of this Christian and heavenly righteousness."

When I have this righteousness reigning in my heart, I come down from heaven like rain making the earth fruitful. That is, I step out into another realm and do good works whenever and wherever the occasion arises. If I am a minister of the word, I preach, I comfort the brokenhearted, I administer the sacraments. If I am a head of a household, I govern my home and family and raise my children in the knowledge and fear of God. If I am a magistrate, I diligently carry out the duties entrusted to me. If I am a servant, I faithfully attend to my master's business. In short, whoever is firmly persuaded that Christ is his righteousness not only cheerfully and gladly works well in his calling, but also willingly submits out of love to rulers and to their laws — even when those laws are severe, strict, and harsh — and, if necessity requires it, to all kinds of burdens and dangers of this present life, knowing that this is God's will and that this obedience is pleasing to Him. So much for the argument of this epistle, which Saint Paul undertook to address, taking as his occasion the false teachers who had darkened this righteousness of faith among the Galatians — and against whom he defends his authority and office.

The First Chapter

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Verse 1. Paul, an apostle — not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

Now that we have set out the argument and summary of this epistle to the Galatians, it is fitting that before entering the text itself we explain what occasioned Saint Paul to write it. He had planted among the Galatians the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the righteousness of faith. But shortly after his departure, certain false teachers crept in and overturned everything he had rightly planted and taught among them. The devil can do nothing other than furiously assault this doctrine with all his force and cunning, and he never rests while he sees even a single spark of it remaining. We ourselves, for the sole reason that we preach the Gospel, suffer from the world, the devil, and his agents — on the left hand and on the right — all the harm they can bring against us.

The Gospel is a doctrine that teaches something far higher than the wisdom, righteousness, and religion of this world — namely, the free forgiveness of sins through Christ. It leaves worldly things in their proper place, as they are, and commends them as God's good creatures. But the world places these creatures above the

Creator, and moreover would use them to pay for sin, escape death, and deserve everlasting life. This the Gospel condemns. The world in turn cannot bear to see condemned what it values and prizes most, and so it charges the Gospel with being a seditious and error-ridden doctrine that overthrows communities, nations, dominions, kingdoms, and empires — offending both God and the emperor, abolishing laws, corrupting good morals, and setting all people free to do as they please. So the world, in its most fervent zeal and what it considers the highest service of God, persecutes this doctrine and abhors those who teach and profess it as the greatest plague upon the earth.

Furthermore, through the preaching of this doctrine the devil is overthrown, his kingdom destroyed, and the law, sin, and death — with which, as the mightiest and most invincible tyrants, he has kept all humanity under his tyranny — are wrested from his hands. In short, his prisoners are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and liberty. Should the devil allow all this? Should the father of lies not employ all his force and cunning schemes to darken, corrupt, and utterly uproot this doctrine of salvation and eternal life? Indeed, Saint Paul complains in this and all his other epistles that even in his own day the devil showed himself a skilled craftsman in this business.

We wanted to note briefly that the Gospel is a doctrine that condemns all human righteousness of every kind, and preaches the righteousness of Christ alone — and to those who embrace it, it brings peace of conscience and every good thing. And yet the world hates and persecutes it with the utmost bitterness.

As I said, the reason Paul wrote this epistle was that shortly after his departure, false teachers had destroyed among the Galatians what he had built with long and great labor. These false apostles were from the party of the circumcision and the sect of the Pharisees, and were men of great reputation and authority. They bragged among the people that they were from the holy and chosen stock of the Jews, that they were Israelites, descendants of Abraham, that they held the promises and the patriarchs — and finally, that they were ministers of Christ and students of the apostles, with whom they had traveled and whose miracles they had witnessed, and perhaps had even performed some signs or miracles themselves, since Christ says that even the wicked can work miracles. Moreover, these false apostles used every clever means they could to undermine Paul's authority, saying: "Why do you hold Paul in such high esteem? Why do you revere him so highly? He was the very last of all to be converted to Christ. But we are disciples of the apostles and were in close company with them. We have seen Christ perform miracles and heard Him preach. Paul came after us and is our inferior. It is impossible that God would let us err — we are of His holy people, ministers of Christ, and we have received the Holy Spirit. Besides, we are many, and Paul is only one, alone, who never traveled with the apostles and has not seen Christ. In fact, he persecuted the church of Christ for a long time. Do you think God would, for Paul's sake alone, allow so many churches to be deceived?"

When men with such authority arrive in any region or city, the people immediately hold them in great admiration, and under this cover of godliness and religion, they deceive not only the simple but also the learned — even those who seem to be somewhat

grounded in the faith. Especially when they boast, as these did, that they are descendants of the patriarchs, ministers of Christ, students of the apostles, and so on. The pope does the same today when he has no scriptural authority to defend himself and falls back on this one argument against us: "The church, the church. Do you think God is so displeased that He would cast off His whole church for a few heretics from Luther's sect? Do you think He would leave His church in error for hundreds of years?" And on this conclusion he mainly rests: that the church cannot be overthrown. Just as many are moved by this argument today, so in Paul's day these false apostles, through grand boasting and self-promotion, blinded the Galatians — so that Paul lost his authority among them and his doctrine came under suspicion.

Against this empty boasting of the false apostles, Paul asserts his apostolic authority with great steadfastness and boldness, commending his calling and defending his ministry. Though he never does anything like this elsewhere, here he will yield to no one — not even to the apostles themselves, much less to any of their students. To cut down their Pharisaical pride and shameless arrogance, he mentions the incident at Antioch where he opposed Peter himself. Without worrying about the offense this might cause, he states plainly in the text that he boldly rebuked and corrected Peter himself — the chief of the apostles, who had seen Christ and been in the closest company with Him. "I am an apostle," he says, "and one who does not defer to what others are. Yes, I was not afraid to rebuke the very pillar among all the apostles." In short, in the first two chapters he does little else but establish his calling, his office, and his Gospel — affirming that it came not from men and that he had not received it through man, but by the reve-

lation of Jesus Christ. And that if he himself, or even an angel from heaven, were to bring any gospel other than what he had preached, that one should be held accursed.

The Certainty of Calling

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But what is Paul's point in boasting like this? I answer: this general principle serves an important purpose — every minister of God's word should be certain of his calling, so that before God and people he may with a confident conscience glory in preaching the Gospel as one who has been called and sent. In the same way, a king's ambassador glories and boasts in the fact that he comes not as a private person but as the king's representative, and because of this dignity he is honored and given the highest place. That honor would not be given to him if he came as a private citizen. Therefore let the Gospel preacher be certain that his calling is from God. And it is fitting that he follow Paul's example and exalt this calling, so that he may gain credibility and authority among the people — just as a king's ambassador magnifies his office and commission. This kind of boasting is not vain but necessary, because he glories not in himself but in the King who sent him, whose authority he desires to be honored and magnified.

Likewise, when Paul so highly commends his calling, he is not seeking his own praise — he is, with a necessary and holy confidence, exalting his ministry. As he says in Romans 11: "Inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry" — that is, I want people to receive me not as Paul of Tarsus, but as Paul

the apostle and ambassador of Jesus Christ. He does this of necessity, to maintain his authority, so that people hearing this would be more attentive and ready to listen to him. For in hearing Paul, they hear not only Paul — they hear Christ Himself through Paul, and God the Father who sent him on this mission. Just as people must reverently honor God's authority and majesty, so they ought to receive and hear His messengers who bring His word with great reverence.

This is therefore a notable passage, in which Paul glories and boasts so fully about his calling that he places himself above all others. If any person boasted of himself this way by worldly standards — regarding himself above all others and claiming everything for himself alone — he would show himself not only a great fool but also greatly offensive. But this kind of boasting is necessary and belongs not to Paul's own glory but to the glory of God — it is an offering of praise and thanksgiving to Him. Through this boasting, the name, grace, and mercy of God is made known to the world. And on this note he begins his epistle.

Verse 1. Paul, an apostle — not from men nor through man, etc.

Right at the opening he confronts those false teachers who boasted of being students of the apostles and sent by them, while despising Paul as someone who was neither trained by the apostles nor sent by anyone to preach the Gospel — but who had pushed his way into the office on his own initiative. Against these, Paul defends his calling, saying: "My calling may appear insignificant to your preachers. But whoever those teachers are who came to you — they were sent either from men or through man. That is, they entered either on their own initiative without being called, or else they were called by other human beings. But my calling is neither

from men nor through man. It is above every calling that any apostle could bestow, for it is from Jesus Christ and from God the Father himself."

When he says "from men," I understand him to mean those who call and push themselves forward when neither God nor man has called or sent them — they run and speak entirely on their own authority. This applies today to certain fanatical spirits who either lurk in the shadows seeking places to pour out their poison, never appearing in public congregations, or else go where the Gospel has already been planted. These I call those sent from men. But when he says "through man," understand it to mean those who do have a divine calling, but receive it through a human being as the instrument. God calls in two ways: through means and without means. Today He calls us to the ministry of His word not directly, but through means — that is, through human beings. But the apostles were called directly by Christ Himself, just as the prophets in the Old Testament were called directly by God. So when Paul says "not from men, nor through man," he is knocking down the false apostles. He is saying, in effect: "However much those snakes boast, what can they boast beyond this — that they came from men (that is, on their own authority without any calling) or through man (that is, sent by other people)? I have nothing to do with either of those categories, and neither should you."

As for me, I was called and sent neither from men nor through man, but directly — by Jesus Christ Himself. My calling is in every respect equal to the calling of the apostles, and I am indeed an apostle. Paul here handles this matter of apostolic calling with great force. Elsewhere he separates the rank of apostleship from other ministries — as in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Ephesians 4,

where he says: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers," and so on, placing apostles first. Properly speaking, those are called apostles who are sent directly by God Himself without any other ordinary human means.

So Matthias was called by God alone. When the other apostles had nominated two candidates, they dared not choose between them themselves, but cast lots and prayed that God would show which one He had chosen. For since the person was to be an apostle, it was fitting that he be called by God. So also Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. For this reason the apostles are also called saints — they were certain of their calling and doctrine, remained faithful in their office, and none of them fell away except Judas, because their calling is holy.

This is Paul's first attack against the false apostles, who ran when no one sent them. Calling is not something to be despised. It is not enough for a man to have the word and sound doctrine — he must also be sure of his calling. Whoever enters the ministry without this certainty enters for no other purpose than to harm and destroy. God never blesses the labor of those who are not called. Even if they teach some good and profitable things, they do not build up the church. So the fanatical spirits of our day have the language of faith on their lips, but they bear no fruit — their chief aim and purpose is to draw people into their false and distorted views. Those who have a certain and holy calling must endure many and great conflicts — as must all whose doctrine is pure and sound — so that they may stand firm in their lawful calling against the endless and relentless assaults of the devil and the rage of the world. What then should someone do whose calling is uncertain and whose doctrine is corrupt?

Here then is our comfort as ministers of the word: we hold a heavenly and holy office to which we have been lawfully called, and in this we triumph against all the gates of hell. On the other side, it is a terrible thing when the conscience says: "You did this without any lawful calling." Such terror shakes the mind of one who is not called — he would wish he had never heard the very word he teaches. For through his disobedience he makes all his works evil, however good they might otherwise be, so that even his greatest works and labors become his greatest sins.

We see, then, how good and necessary this exaltation and confidence in our ministry is. In earlier days when I was a young theology student and teacher, I thought Paul was acting unwisely in boasting so frequently about his calling throughout all his epistles. But I did not understand his purpose. I did not know how weighty a matter the ministry of God's word is. I knew nothing of the doctrine of faith and of a truly clear conscience, since in those days no certainty was taught in either the schools or the churches — everything was filled with the speculative subtleties of the scholastic theologians. Therefore no one was able to understand the dignity and power of this holy and spiritual confidence in a true and lawful calling, which serves first for the glory of God, second for the advancement of our office, and beyond that for the salvation of ourselves and of the people. For in this confidence we seek no reputation in the world, no praise among people, no money, no pleasures, no worldly favor. Rather, since we hold a divine calling and are doing God's work, and since the people have great need to be assured of our calling — so they may know our word is the word of

God — we boldly and confidently declare it. It is not a vain pride, then, but a most holy confidence against the devil and the world, and true humility before God.

Verse 1. And by God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

Paul is so inflamed with zeal here that he cannot wait until he reaches the body of the epistle, but bursts out right in the opening title and declares what is in his heart. His purpose in this epistle is to treat and defend the righteousness that comes by faith, and at the same time to overthrow the law and the righteousness that comes by works. He is filled with these thoughts, and out of the wonderful and overflowing abundance of the excellent wisdom and knowledge of Christ in his heart, his mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). This flame — this great burning fire in his heart — cannot be hidden and will not let him hold his tongue. Therefore he did not think it enough to say he was an apostle sent by Jesus Christ, but added: by God the Father, who raised Him from the dead. This is the theme of the epistle to the Galatians.

The addition of the words "and by God the Father," and so on, may seem unnecessary. But as I said, Paul is speaking out of the overflow of his heart. His mind burns with the desire to set forth, even at the very entrance of the epistle, the unsearchable riches of Christ and to preach the righteousness of God — which is declared in the resurrection of the dead. Christ, who is alive and risen, speaks through him and moves him to say this. So not without reason he adds that he is also an apostle by God the Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. He is saying, in effect: "I have to deal with Satan and with those vipers — Satan's instruments — who are trying to rob me of the righteousness of Christ, who was

raised by God the Father from the dead, through which alone we are made righteous, and through which we too will be raised in the last day from death to everlasting life. But those who work to overthrow the righteousness of Christ are opposing both the Father and the Son and the work of them both."

So Paul, even at the very beginning, bursts into the whole matter he treats throughout this epistle. As I said, he treats of the resurrection of Christ — who rose to make us righteous (Romans 4:24-25) — and in doing so has conquered the law, sin, death, and all evils. Christ's victory, then, is the conquest of the law, of sin, of our flesh, of the world, the devil, death, hell, and all evils — and this victory He has given to us. Though these tyrants and enemies accuse us and fill us with fear, they cannot drive us to despair or condemn us. For Christ, whom God the Father has raised from the dead, is our righteousness and our victory. Therefore thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). Amen.

But notice how aptly and purposefully Paul speaks here. He does not say "by God who made heaven and earth, who is Lord of the angels, who commanded Abraham to leave his country, who sent Moses to Pharaoh the king, who brought Israel out of Egypt" — as the false apostles did, who boasted of the God of their fathers, the creator, sustainer, and preserver of all things, who worked wonders among His people. Paul had something different in his heart — the righteousness of Christ — and therefore he uses words that go directly to the heart of his subject, saying: "I am an apostle, neither from men nor through man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." You see, then, with what fervor of spirit Paul is moved in this matter that he sets out to

establish and maintain against the whole kingdom of hell, the power and wisdom of the world, and against the devil and his apostles.

Verse 2. And all the brothers who are with me.

This addition serves well to silence the false apostles. For all of Paul's arguments aim at exalting and strengthening his ministry, and correspondingly at discrediting theirs. He is saying, in effect: "Though it is already more than enough that I have been sent as an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, yet lest I stand alone, I add — more than is even necessary — all the brothers, who are not apostles but fellow soldiers. They join me in writing this epistle and bear witness with me that my doctrine is true and from God. Therefore we are certain that Christ is present with us, that He teaches and speaks among us and in our church. As for the false apostles, whatever they may be, they are sent either from men or through men. But I am sent by God the Father and by Jesus Christ, who is our life and resurrection (John 11:25). My other brothers are sent from God as well — though through man, that is, through me. Therefore, so they may not say I am arrogantly setting myself alone against them, I have my brothers with me, all of one mind, as faithful witnesses — who think, write, and teach the very same things I do." So much for the title of the author. Now to the recipients.

Verse 1. To the churches of Galatia.

Paul had preached the Gospel throughout all of Galatia, and although he had not brought the entire region to Christ, he had established many churches there — into which the false apostles, Satan's ministers, had crept. Similarly today, the fanatical

Anabaptists do not go to places where opponents of the Gospel are in power, but to places where Christians and good people live who love the Gospel. Among such people they insinuate themselves — even in the territories of tyrants and persecutors of the Gospel — sneaking into homes under crafty pretenses and pouring out their poison to the ruin of many. But why don't they go instead into the cities, regions, and territories of the papists, and openly profess and defend their doctrine in the presence of wicked princes, bishops, and university doctors, as we have done by God's help and assistance? These tender so-called martyrs will risk no danger, but go to wherever the Gospel already has a home, where they can live in safety and great comfort. The false apostles acted the same way — they did not put themselves in danger by going to Jerusalem to Caiaphas, or to Rome to the emperor, or to other places where no one had preached before, as Paul and the other apostles did. Instead they came to Galatia, which had already been won for Christ by Paul's labor and effort, and to Asia, Corinth, and other places where good people were found who confessed the name of Christ, persecuted no one, and endured all things quietly. There the enemies of Christ's cross could live in great safety, free from any persecution.

Here we learn that it is the common experience of all godly teachers that, besides the persecution they suffer from the wicked and ungrateful world and the great labor they bear in planting churches, they are also forced to watch what they have long taught in purity be quickly overturned by fanatical spirits, who afterward reign and rule in their place. This grieves godly ministers more than any persecution by tyrants. Therefore, let no one be a minister of the Gospel who is not willing to be despised in this way, or

who is unwilling to bear this reproach — or if he is unwilling, let him hand over his charge to another. We ourselves experience the same thing today. We are greatly despised and harassed outwardly by tyrants, and inwardly by those whom we restored to freedom through the Gospel, and also by false brothers. But this is our comfort and our glory: being called by God, we have the promise of everlasting life and look forward to the reward that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man. For when the great shepherd Christ appears, we will receive an incorruptible crown of glory — and even now in this world He will not allow us to perish for lack of what we need.

Jerome raises a significant question here: why does Paul call these "churches" when they were no longer acting like churches? Is it, Jerome asks, because Paul is writing to Galatians who had turned away from Christ and grace and gone back to Moses and the law? My answer is that Paul calls them the churches of Galatia using a figure of speech common in Scripture — naming the whole by a part. For in the same way, writing to the Corinthians, he rejoices on their behalf that the grace of God was given to them in Christ — that they were enriched through Him in all speech and knowledge — and yet many of them had been led astray by false apostles and denied the resurrection of the dead.

Although the Galatians had fallen away from Paul's doctrine, baptism, the word, and the name of Christ remained among them. There were also some good men who had not defected — who had a right understanding of the word and sacraments and used them rightly. Furthermore, these things could not be defiled by those who had defected. For baptism, the Gospel, and other holy things are not made unholy because many who receive them are corrupt

and hold wrong views of them. They remain holy and unchanged, whether they are among the godly or the ungodly — they can be neither defiled nor sanctified by the people who use them. By our good or evil conduct, our good or evil life and morals, they may be brought into disrepute or honor in the sight of pagans, but not before God. Therefore, wherever the substance of the word and sacraments remains, there is the holy church — even if Antichrist reigns there. As Scripture testifies, Antichrist does not sit in a stable of fiends, or in a pigsty, or among unbelievers, but in the highest and holiest place of all — the temple of God. So even though spiritual tyrants reign, there must still be a temple of God, and it is preserved under them. My brief answer to this question is therefore: the church is universal throughout the whole world, wherever the Gospel of God and the sacraments are. The Jews, the Muslims, and other fanatical spirits are not the church because they fight against these things and reject them. Now follows Paul's greeting.

Verse 3. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I trust you are not unaware of what grace and peace mean, since these terms are common in Paul and are by now not obscure or unfamiliar. But since we are undertaking to expound this epistle — not because it is necessary due to any great difficulty in it, but so that our consciences may be strengthened against heresies yet to come — do not be weary if we repeat things that we teach, preach, sing, and write elsewhere at other times. For if we neglect the article of justification, we lose everything. Therefore it is most necessary, above all things, that we teach and keep repeating this article — as Moses says about his law, it cannot be driven into our ears

too often or too hard. Even if we learn it and understand it well, no one grasps it perfectly or believes it with his whole heart, so frail is our flesh and so resistant to the Spirit.

This greeting of the apostle is unlike anything the world had heard before the Gospel was preached. These two words — grace and peace — contain within them everything that belongs to Christianity. Grace removes sin, and peace quiets the conscience. The two terrors that torment us are sin and an accusing conscience. But Christ has conquered these two terrors and trampled them underfoot, both in this world and in the world to come. The world does not know this and therefore can offer no certainty about the overcoming of sin, conscience, and death. Only Christians possess this kind of doctrine and are trained and armed with it to gain victory over sin, despair, and eternal death. It is a doctrine that did not come from free will, nor was it invented by human reason or wisdom — it was given from above. Moreover, these two words — grace and peace — contain the whole sum of Christianity. Grace contains the forgiveness of sins; peace contains a quiet and joyful conscience. But peace of conscience can never be had unless sin is first forgiven. And sin is not forgiven by fulfilling the law — no one is able to satisfy the law. Rather, the law exposes sin, accuses and terrifies the conscience, declares the wrath of God, and drives to despair. Still less is sin taken away by human works and inventions — by invented forms of worship, strange religious practices, vows, and pilgrimages. In the end, no work can take away sin — sin is only increased by works. For those who try to justify themselves and earn merit, the harder they sweat and labor to free themselves from sin, the deeper they are sunk in it. There is no means to take away sin but grace alone. Therefore Paul in the

greetings of all his epistles sets grace and peace against sin and a troubled conscience. This must be carefully noted. The words are simple — but in temptation it is the hardest thing in the world to be firmly persuaded in our hearts that by grace alone, with no other means in heaven or earth, we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

The world does not understand this doctrine and therefore will not and cannot endure it, but condemns it as heretical and wicked. It boasts of free will, the light of reason, the soundness of natural powers and capacities, and good works — claiming these are the means by which it can deserve and attain grace and peace, that is, the forgiveness of sins and a quiet conscience. But it is impossible for the conscience to be quiet and joyful unless it has peace through grace — that is, through the forgiveness of sins promised in Christ. Many people have labored hard, devising all kinds of religions, religious orders, and spiritual exercises, hoping to find peace and quiet of conscience. But by doing so they have only plunged themselves into greater misery, for all such schemes only increase doubt and despair. Therefore there will be no rest for my soul or yours unless we hear the word of grace and hold to it steadfastly and faithfully. Then our conscience will without a doubt find grace and peace.

The apostle fittingly distinguishes this grace and peace from every other kind of grace and peace. He wishes the Galatians grace and peace — not from the emperor, or from kings and princes, who commonly persecute the godly and rise up against the Lord and His anointed (Psalm 2), and not from the world (for in the world, Christ says, you will have trouble), but from God our Father — which is to say, he wishes them a heavenly peace. As Christ says:

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." The peace the world offers is nothing more than the peace of our possessions and bodies. Similarly, the favor of the world only allows us to enjoy our goods and remain in our property. But in times of affliction and in the hour of death, the grace and favor of the world cannot help us — they cannot deliver us from trouble, despair, and death. But when the grace and peace of God are in the heart, a person becomes strong — he can neither be crushed by adversity nor inflated by prosperity, but walks steadily forward on the right path. For he takes heart and courage from the victory of Christ's death, and the confidence of that victory begins to reign in his conscience over sin and death, because through Christ he has the assured forgiveness of his sins. Once he has received this, his conscience is at peace and is comforted by the word of grace. Thus a person comforted and emboldened by the grace of God — that is, by the forgiveness of sins and by this peace of conscience — is able to bear and overcome all troubles, even death itself, with courage. This peace of God is not given to the world, for the world never longs for it and never understands it — it is given to those who believe. And this comes about by no other means than the pure grace of God.

A Rule to Be Observed, That Men Ought to Abstain from the Curious Searching of God's Majesty

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But why does the apostle add in this greeting "and from our Lord Jesus Christ"? Was it not enough to say "from God our Father"? Why then does he link Jesus Christ with the Father? You have often heard from us that there is a principle in Scripture that must be carefully observed: we must refrain from curiously prying into God's majesty, which is unbearable to man's body and far more so to his mind. "No one," says Scripture, "shall see Me and live." The pope, the Muslims, the Jews, and all who trust in their own merits disregard this principle — removing Christ the Mediator from their view, they speak of God directly, pray to God directly, and do everything they do before God directly.

For example, the monk reasons this way: "The works I do please God. God will regard my vows and save me for their sake." The Muslim says: "If I keep the things commanded in the Quran, God will accept me and give me everlasting life." The Jew thinks: "If I keep what the law commands, I will find God merciful to me,

and so I will be saved." Likewise today a certain class of foolish enthusiasts — boasting of the spirit, of revelations, of visions, and other extraordinary things I cannot begin to describe — pursue wonders beyond their capacity. These new-style monks have invented a new cross and new works, and they dream that by performing them they please God. In short, all who do not know the article of justification remove Christ the mercy seat and presume to comprehend God in His majesty by the judgment of reason, and to satisfy Him with their works.

But true Christian theology — as I frequently remind you — does not present God to us in His bare majesty, as Moses and other systems of teaching do. It does not command us to search out the nature of God, but to know His will as revealed to us in Christ, whom He willed to take on our flesh, to be born and to die for our sins, and to have this proclaimed among all nations. For since the world did not know God through wisdom in the wisdom of God, it pleased God through the foolishness of what is preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1). Therefore, when your conscience is in conflict — wrestling with the law, sin, and death in the presence of God — nothing is more dangerous than to wander through curious speculations about heaven and there to search out God in His incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty, thinking about how He created the world and how He governs it. If you seek to comprehend God in this way and try to satisfy Him without Christ the Mediator, using your own works as a bridge between yourself and Him, you will inevitably fall as Lucifer fell, and in horrible despair lose God and everything. For as God is in His own nature immeasurable, incomprehensible, and infinite, so is He intolerable to human nature.

Therefore, if you want to be safe and out of danger in matters of conscience and salvation, rein in this climbing and presumptuous spirit, and seek God as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 1. "We preach Christ crucified," he says, "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." So begin where Christ began — in the womb of the virgin, in the manger, at His mother's breast. For to this end He came down, was born, lived among people, suffered, was crucified and died — so that in every way He might set Himself plainly before our eyes and fasten the eyes of our hearts upon Himself, and thereby keep us from climbing up into heaven and prying curiously into the divine majesty.

Whenever you are dealing with the matter of justification and struggling within yourself about how God is to be found — the God who justifies and accepts sinners — where He is to be sought, and in what way, know this: there is no other God except this man Jesus Christ. Embrace Him and cling to Him with all your heart, setting aside all curious speculation about the divine majesty. For whoever pries into God's majesty will be overwhelmed by His glory — I speak from experience. But these vain spirits who deal with God while excluding the Mediator will not believe me. Christ Himself says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Therefore, apart from this way — Christ — you will find no path to the Father, only wandering; no truth, only hypocrisy and lies; no life, only eternal death. So in the matter of justification, mark this well: whenever

any of us must wrestle with the law, sin, death, and all other evils, we must look to no other God than to this God incarnate, clothed in human nature.

Outside the matter of justification, however, when you are disputing with Jews, Muslims, papists, heretics, and others about the power, wisdom, and majesty of God, then bring to bear all your ability and effort, and be as deep and as precise a reasoner as you can be — for then you are in a different domain. But in the case of conscience, of righteousness and life — which I urge you to mark carefully here — when wrestling against the law, sin, death, and the devil, or in the matter of satisfaction, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and everlasting life, you must withdraw your mind entirely from all speculation about God's majesty and look only upon this man Jesus Christ, who presents Himself to us as Mediator and says: "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." If you do this, you will perceive the love, goodness, and sweetness of God. You will see His wisdom, power, and majesty softened and adjusted to your capacity. Indeed, you will find in this mirror and this pleasant contemplation everything, according to what Paul says in Colossians 2:3: "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Also in Colossians 2:9: "For in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily." The world knows nothing of this, and therefore searches out God's will by setting aside the promise in Christ — to its great destruction. For no one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

This is why Paul so often joins Jesus Christ with God the Father — to teach us what true Christian religion is. It does not begin at the top, as other religions do, but at the bottom. It calls us to

climb by Jacob's ladder, on which God Himself leans, with His feet touching the very earth beside Jacob's head. Therefore, whenever you are dealing with the matter of your salvation, set aside all curious speculation about God's unsearchable majesty, all thoughts of works, traditions, philosophy, and even the law of God — and run straight to the manger. Take this infant in your arms, this little baby of the virgin, and see Him as He was born, nursing, growing up, living among people, teaching, dying, rising again, ascending above all the heavens, and having authority over all things. By this means you may shake off all terrors and errors, as the sun drives away clouds. This vision and contemplation will keep you on the right path, following where Christ has gone. Therefore Paul, in wishing grace and peace not only from God the Father but also from Jesus Christ, teaches first that we should refrain from prying into the divine majesty — for no one knows God — and instead hear Christ, who is in the Father's embrace and reveals to us His will, and who is also appointed by the Father as Teacher, so that every one of us should hear Him.

Christ Is God by Nature

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The second thing Paul teaches here is a confirmation of our faith that Christ is truly God. Passages like this concerning the divinity of Christ must be gathered and marked carefully — not only as a defense against the Arians and other heretics past and future, but also to strengthen our own faith. For Satan will not fail to attack every article of our faith before we die. He is the most deadly enemy of faith, because he knows that faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Therefore it is vital for us to work at making our faith firm, and to allow it to grow and be strengthened through diligent and continuous engagement with the word and fervent prayer, so that we may be able to resist Satan.

That Christ is truly God is clearly shown by the fact that Paul attributes to Him the same things he attributes to the Father — namely, divine power: the giving of grace, the forgiveness of sins, peace of conscience, life, and victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell. It would not be lawful to do this — in fact it would be blasphemy — unless Christ were truly God, according to the word: "I will not give My glory to another." Furthermore, no one gives to others what he himself does not have. Since Christ gives grace,

peace, and the Holy Spirit, and delivers from the power of the devil, from sin and death, it is certain that He possesses an infinite and divine power equal in every way to the power of the Father.

And when Christ gives grace and peace, He gives them not in the way the apostles gave and brought them to people through preaching the Gospel — He gives them as their author and creator. The Father creates and gives life, grace, peace, and all other good things. The Son creates and gives the very same things. To give grace, peace, and everlasting life, to forgive sins, to make righteous, to bring to life, to deliver from death and the devil — these are not the works of any creature but of the divine Majesty alone. Angels cannot create or give these things. Therefore these works belong solely to the glory of the sovereign Majesty, the maker of all things. Since Paul attributes to Christ the same power of creating and giving all these things equally with the Father, it necessarily follows that Christ is truly and essentially God.

Many such arguments appear in John, where it is proved and established from the works attributed equally to the Son and to the Father that the divinity of the Father and of the Son is one and the same. Therefore the gifts we receive from the Father and the gifts we receive from the Son are also one and the same. Otherwise Paul would have written differently — something like: "Grace from God the Father, and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ." But by joining them together, he attributes both grace and peace equally to the Son and to the Father. I urge you to note this carefully because it is a serious concern that, among so many errors and in the great variety and confusion of sects, there might arise new Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, and similar heretics who could harm the churches with their subtlety.

Indeed, the Arians were sharp and clever men. They acknowledged that Christ has two natures and is called "God of very God" — but only in name. "Christ," they said, "is the most noble and perfect creature above the angels, through whom God afterward created heaven and earth and all other things." Muhammad also speaks respectfully of Christ. But all of this is nothing more than fine-sounding imagination and words pleasing and persuasive to human reason, by which these fanatical spirits deceive people who are not careful. Paul, however, speaks differently about Christ: "You are rooted and grounded in this belief — that Christ is not merely a perfect creature but truly God, who does the very same things that God the Father does." He has divine works, not of a creature but of the Creator — because He gives grace and peace, and to give them is to condemn sin, to conquer death, and to trample the devil underfoot. No angel can give these things. Since they are attributed to Christ, it necessarily follows that He is truly God by nature.

Verse 4. Who gave Himself for our sins.

Paul deals with the argument of this epistle in virtually every word. He has nothing on his lips but Christ, and therefore every word carries a fervor of spirit and life. Mark how well and purposefully he speaks. He does not say "who received our works at our hands," or "who accepted the sacrifices of Moses' law, religious observances, religious orders, masses, vows, and pilgrimages" — but who gave. What did He give? Not gold or silver, not animals or passover lambs, not an angel — but Himself. For what purpose? Not for a crown, not for a kingdom, not for our holiness or righteousness — but for our sins. These words are like thunderclaps from heaven against all kinds of human righteousness — as is also

John's declaration: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Therefore we must attend carefully to every word of Paul and not take them lightly or pass over them hastily, for they are full of comfort and extraordinarily strengthen terrified consciences.

But how may we obtain forgiveness of our sins? Paul answers that the man who is called Jesus Christ the Son of God gave Himself for them. These are excellent and most comforting words, and they are the fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant — that our sins are taken away by no other means than the Son of God delivered to death. It is with such weapons as these that the Papacy must be destroyed, and all the false religions of the pagans — all works, all merits, and all superstitious ceremonies. For if our sins could be taken away by our own works, merits, and satisfactions, why would the Son of God need to be given for them? But since He was given for them, it follows that we cannot remove them by our own works.

Furthermore, this statement declares that our sins are so great, so infinite and overpowering, that it is impossible for the whole world to make satisfaction for even one of them. Surely the immensity of the ransom — Christ the Son of God, who gave Himself for our sins — makes sufficiently clear that we can neither pay for sin nor have mastery over it. The force and power of sin is set forth and magnified enormously by these words: who gave Himself for our sins. Therefore we must mark the infinite greatness of the price paid for sin — and then it will be plain that sin's power is so great that it could be dealt with by no other means than the giving of the Son of God. Whoever considers this well understands that this one word "sin" encompasses God's everlasting wrath and the

entire kingdom of Satan, and that it is something more terrible than can be expressed — something that ought truly to move us and fill us with awe. But we are careless — we minimize sin and make nothing of it. Even when it brings the sting and torment of conscience, we still do not believe it is of such weight and force that it cannot be removed by some small work or act of merit on our part.

This statement therefore witnesses that all people are servants and slaves of sin, and — as Paul says elsewhere — are sold under sin (Romans 7:14). It also witnesses that sin is the most cruel and powerful tyrant over all people, one that cannot be overcome by the power of any creature, whether angels or humans — but only by the sovereign and infinite power of Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for it.

Moreover, this statement offers a remarkable comfort to the consciences of all who are terrified by the greatness of their sins. For though sin may be ever so unconquerable a tyrant, since Christ has overcome it through His death it cannot harm those who believe in Him. And if we arm ourselves with this belief and cling with all our hearts to this man Jesus Christ, light breaks in and clear judgment is given to us, so that we can most certainly and freely evaluate all kinds of religious life. For when we hear that sin is such an invincible tyrant, we immediately draw the necessary conclusion: What then are the papists, monks, nuns, priests, Muslims, Anabaptists, and all who trust in their works accomplishing, when they try to abolish and overcome sin by their own traditions, preparatory works, satisfactions, and so on? At once we judge all those movements to be wicked and destructive — for by

them the glory of God and of Christ is not merely diminished but utterly taken away, and our own glory is set up and established in its place.

But weigh carefully every word of Paul, and mark especially this pronoun "our." The whole effect depends on applying the pronouns correctly — something that appears very often in Scripture, and in which there is always great force and power. It is easy enough to say and believe that Christ the Son of God was given for the sins of Peter, of Paul, and of other saints whom we regard as worthy of this grace. But it is very hard for you — who judge yourself unworthy of this grace — to say from your heart and truly believe that Christ was given for your own invincible, infinite, and terrible sins. Therefore in the abstract, without the personal pronoun, it is easy to extol and magnify the gift of Christ — that Christ was given for sins, for the sins of others who are worthy. But when it comes to applying this pronoun "our" to ourselves, our weak nature and human reason recoils. It dares not approach God or promise itself that so great a treasure could be freely given to it. And therefore it will not deal with God until it is first pure and clean of sin. So even when it reads or hears the words "who gave Himself for our sins," it does not apply the pronoun "our" to itself but to others who are worthy and holy. As for itself, it will wait until it has made itself worthy by its own works.

This is nothing other than human reason wishing that sin were not as powerful and serious as it truly is. From this attitude comes the behavior of the hypocrites who, being ignorant of Christ, though they feel the sting of sin, think they will be able to remove it easily enough by their good works and merits. Secretly in their hearts they wish that the words "who gave Himself for our sins"

were spoken merely in humility, and that their sins were not truly real sins but trivial matters. In short, human reason would like to bring before God a pretend sinner — one who feels no fear and has no real sense of sin. It would bring to God one who is healthy, not one who needs a physician. And when it feels no sin, then it would believe that Christ was given for our sins.

The whole world is in this condition — especially those who wish to be counted more holy and devout than others, such as monks and all who try to justify themselves. These confess with their mouths that they are sinners and that they commit sins daily — however, not sins so great or so many that they cannot remove them by their own works. And beyond this, they actually intend to bring their righteousness and merits to Christ's judgment seat and demand the reward of eternal life from the judge's hand. Meanwhile, pretending great humility and not wishing to claim they are entirely free from sin, they manufacture certain minor sins, so that for the forgiveness of these they may pray with great devotion as the tax collector did: "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:11). To such people, Paul's words "for our sins" seem trivial and insignificant. They therefore neither understand them, nor in times of real temptation — when they feel the actual weight of sin — can they draw any comfort from them. They are left with nothing but complete despair.

This, then, is the chief knowledge and true wisdom of Christians: to hold as absolutely true, effective, and supremely important Paul's words that Christ was delivered to death not for our righteousness or holiness, but for our sins — and that these are real and actual sins, great, many, yes infinite and unconquerable. Therefore do not think of them as small and removable by your

own works. Nor, if you feel crushed by the weight of your sins in life or in death, should you despair on account of their greatness. Instead, learn from Paul to believe that Christ was given not for pretend or counterfeit sins, nor for small ones, but for great and massive ones. Not for one or two, but for all. Not for sins already conquered — for no person, no angel, is capable of conquering the smallest sin — but for invincible sins. And unless you are found among those who say "our sins" — that is, those who hold this doctrine of faith, teach it, hear it, learn it, love it, and believe it — there is no salvation for you.

Therefore strive diligently to be able to say with firm confidence — not only when you are free from temptation, but also in the danger and conflict of death, when your conscience is terrified by the memory of your past sins and the devil attacks you with great force, trying to overwhelm you with heaps, floods, and whole seas of sins, to terrify you, to pull you away from Christ, and to drive you to despair — to be able to say at that moment: Christ the Son of God was given not for the righteous and holy but for the unrighteous and sinners. If I were righteous and without sin, I would have no need of Christ as my reconciler. Why then, O you wicked accusing spirit, do you try to make me look for holiness and righteousness in myself, when in truth I have nothing in me but sins — and the gravest sins at that? Not pretend or trivial sins, but sins against the first table: great unbelief, doubt, despair, contempt of God, hatred, ignorance, and blasphemy of God, ingratitude, misuse of God's name, neglecting, hating, and despising the word of God, and the like. And beyond these, carnal sins against the second table as well: failing to honor my parents, not obeying those in authority, coveting another man's possessions or wife, and so on —

though these are lighter faults compared with the former. And even if I have not committed murder, fornication, theft, and such sins against the second table in outward act, I have committed them in heart. Therefore I am a transgressor of all God's commandments, and the number of my sins is so great that they cannot be counted — for I have sinned beyond the number of the sands of the sea.

Beyond this, Satan is such a cunning trickster that he can even turn my righteousness and good works into great sins. Since my sins are so heavy, so infinite, so terrible and unconquerable, and since my righteousness does me no good before God but only hinders me — for all these reasons Christ the Son of God was given to death, to put them away and to save me and all who believe. Here then lies the substance of eternal salvation — in taking these words as effective, true, and of the greatest importance. I do not say this lightly, for I have often proved it by experience, and I find daily how hard it is to believe — especially in the conflict of conscience — that Christ was given not for the holy, righteous, worthy, and His friends, but for wicked sinners who are unworthy and His enemies, who have deserved God's wrath and everlasting death.

Let us therefore arm our hearts with these and similar passages of Holy Scripture, so that we may answer the devil when he accuses us and says: "You are a sinner, and therefore you are damned" — answering in this way: "Because you say I am a sinner, I will be righteous and saved." "No," says the devil, "you will be damned." "No," I say, "for I fly to Christ, who gave Himself for my sins. Therefore, Satan, you will accomplish nothing against me by trying to terrify me with the greatness of my sins and plunge me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt, and blasphemy

of God. Rather, by saying I am a sinner, you have given me armor and weapon against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and trample you underfoot — for Christ died for sinners. Moreover, you yourself are preaching the glory of God to me. For you are reminding me of God's fatherly love toward me, a wretched and condemned sinner — He who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. And as often as you charge that I am a sinner, so often you remind me of the gift of Christ my Redeemer, upon whose shoulders, and not mine, all my sins lie. For the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. And again: For the transgression of His people He was stricken. Therefore when you accuse me of being a sinner, you do not terrify me — you comfort me beyond measure."

Whoever knows this one skill well will easily avoid all the devices and snares of the devil, who by putting a person in mind of his sins drives him to despair and destroys him — unless he resists with this skill and this heavenly wisdom, by which alone sin, death, and the devil are overcome. But the person who does not push aside the memory of his sin — who holds onto it and tortures himself with his own thoughts, either trying to help himself by his own strength and ingenuity, or waiting until his conscience becomes quiet on its own — falls into Satan's trap, miserable afflicts himself, and at last is overcome by the relentless pressure of temptation. For the devil will never stop accusing the conscience.

Against this temptation we must use Paul's words, in which he gives a true and excellent definition of Christ: Christ is the Son of God and of the virgin, delivered and put to death for our sins. If the devil offers any other definition of Christ, say: "That definition

and the thing defined are false, and I will not accept it." I say this with good reason, for I know what moves me to urge so strongly that we learn to define Christ from Paul's own words. For Christ is no harsh exactor — He is the forgiver of the sins of the whole world. Therefore if you are a sinner — as indeed we all are — do not picture Christ on a rainbow as a judge, for that will terrify you and you will despair of His mercy. Instead, take hold of His true definition: Christ the Son of God and of the virgin is One who does not terrify, does not afflict, does not condemn us for sin, does not call us to account for our past evil life — but who gave Himself for our sins and with one sacrifice has put away the sins of the whole world, nailing them to the cross and completely removing them by Himself.

Learn this definition carefully, and especially practice this pronoun "our" until, by believing it, this one syllable swallows up all your sins. That is to say, know with certainty that Christ has taken away the sins not of certain people only, but of you — yes, of the whole world. Then let your sins not merely be sins in the abstract — let them be your own sins. Believe that Christ was given not only for other people's sins but for yours. Hold this firmly, and do not allow yourself by any means to be drawn away from this most sweet definition of Christ, which brings joy even to the angels in heaven — that Christ, by His proper and true definition, is no Moses, no lawgiver, no tyrant, but the Mediator for sins, the free giver of grace, righteousness, and life, who gave Himself not for our merits, holiness, righteousness, or godly life, but for our sins. It is true that Christ is also an interpreter of the law — but that is not His proper and principal office.

These things we know well enough in words and can speak of readily — but in practice, in the actual conflict, when the devil tries to obscure Christ and tear the word of grace out of our hearts, we find that we do not know them as well as we should. Whoever at that moment could truly define Christ — and see Him and magnify Him as his most sweet Savior and great High Priest rather than as a strict judge — this person would have overcome all evils and would already be in the kingdom of heaven. But to do this in the heat of the conflict is, of all things, the hardest. I speak from experience. For I know the devil's subtleties. At such times he does not only try to frighten us with the terror of the law — he also makes a massive beam out of the smallest splinter, that is, turns something that is no sin into something like hell, for he is remarkably skilled at aggravating sin and unsettling the conscience even in the middle of good works. He is also in the habit of frightening us by transforming himself into the very person of the Mediator. He will bring before us some passage of Scripture or some saying of Christ, then suddenly strike our hearts and present himself in such a way that we could swear it were Christ Himself whose words he quoted — leaving us stuck fast in that thought. And such is the subtlety of this enemy that he will not set before us the whole Christ, but only a piece of Him — namely that He is the Son of God and man born of the virgin. Then he immediately attaches something else: some saying of Christ with which He threatens impenitent sinners — such as that in Luke 13: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." By poisoning the true definition of Christ in this way, he manages to make us believe we are dealing with Christ the true Mediator, while our troubled conscience actually feels and judges Him to be a tyrant and a judge. Thus, deceived by Satan, we easily

lose that sweet vision of our High Priest and Savior Christ — and once it is lost, we flee from Him no less than from the devil himself.

This is why I urge you so earnestly to learn the true and proper definition of Christ from these words of Paul: who gave Himself for our sins. If He gave Himself to death for our sins, then without question He is no tyrant or judge who will condemn us for our sins. He is not one who casts down the afflicted but One who raises up the fallen — a merciful helper and comforter of the weary and brokenhearted. Otherwise Paul would be lying when he says who gave Himself for our sins. If I define Christ in this way, I define Him rightly and take hold of the true Christ and truly possess Him. I also leave aside curious speculations about the divine majesty and anchor myself to the humanity of Christ, and in this way truly come to know the will of God. Here there is no fear — only sweetness, joy, peace of conscience, and the like. And with this, a light is opened that shows me the true knowledge of God, of myself, of all creatures, and of all the corruption of the devil's kingdom. We are not teaching anything new — we are repeating and confirming old things that the apostles and all godly teachers before us have taught. Would to God we could teach and confirm them so thoroughly that they might rest not only on our lips but be deeply rooted in the bottom of our hearts — and especially that we might be able to call on them in the agony and conflict of death.

Verse 4. That He might deliver us from this present evil age.

In these words Paul also develops more fully the argument of this epistle. He calls the present age — everything that has been, is, and will be in this world — "this present evil age," to distinguish it from that everlasting world to come. He calls it evil because every-

thing in this world is subject to the malice of the devil, who reigns over the whole world. For this reason the world is called the kingdom of the devil. There is nothing in this world but ignorance, contempt, blasphemy, and hatred of God, along with disobedience against all of God's words and works. We live in and under this kingdom of the world.

Here again you see that no one is able by his own works or strength to put away sin, because this present world is evil and — as Saint John says — lies in wickedness. As many as are in the world are therefore slaves of the devil, compelled to serve him and do everything at his pleasure. What good was it, then, to establish so many religious orders for the putting away of sins, to devise so many great and enormously demanding works, to wear hair shirts, to beat the body with whips until the blood flowed, to travel on pilgrimage to St. James in chains and the like? Even if you do all these things, this definitive verdict still stands against you: you are in this present evil age and not in the kingdom of Christ. And if you are not in the kingdom of Christ, then you certainly belong to the kingdom of Satan, which is this evil world. Therefore all gifts of body or mind that you possess — wisdom, righteousness, holiness, eloquence, power, beauty, riches — are only tools of hellish tyranny, and with all of them you are compelled to serve the devil and extend his kingdom.

With your wisdom you darken the wisdom and knowledge of Christ and lead people astray with your corrupt teaching, so that they cannot come to the grace and knowledge of Christ. You promote and praise your own righteousness and holiness, while you despise and condemn the righteousness of Christ — by which alone we are justified and brought to life — as wicked and devilish. In

short, by your power you destroy the kingdom of Christ and abuse that power to uproot the Gospel, to persecute and kill the ministers of Christ, and to harm all who listen to them. Therefore if you are without Christ, your wisdom is double foolishness, and your righteousness is double sin and ungodliness — because it does not know the wisdom and righteousness of Christ, and moreover it darkens, hinders, blasphemes, and persecutes those very things. Paul is right, then, to call this world evil — for when it is at its best, it is at its worst. In religious, wise, and learned people the world appears at its best, and yet in them it is doubly evil. I pass over those gross vices against the second table — disobedience to parents and rulers, adultery, fornication, greed, theft, murder, and malice — in which the world is completely drowned. These are actually light faults compared to the wisdom and righteousness of the wicked, with which they fight against the first table. The white devil who drives men to commit spiritual sins and then lets them sell those sins as righteousness is far more dangerous than the black devil who drives them only to commit fleshly sins — sins that the world at least recognizes as sins.

By the words "that He might deliver us," Paul reveals what is at the heart of this epistle: that we need grace and Christ, and that no other creature — neither man nor angel — can deliver humanity out of this present evil age. For it belongs to the divine Majesty alone — not to any man or angel — to do what Christ has done: put away sin and deliver us from the tyranny and kingdom of the devil, that is, from this wicked world, which is an obedient servant and eager follower of the devil its god. Whatever that murderer and father of lies does or says, the world as his most loyal and obedient son diligently follows and carries out. Therefore the world is full of

ignorance of God, hatred, lies, errors, blasphemy, contempt of God, and moreover of gross sins: murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, robberies, and the like — because it follows its father the devil, who is a liar and murderer. And the more wise, righteous, and holy people are apart from Christ, the more harm they do to the Gospel. So we ourselves, when we were religious men in the Papacy before God enlightened us with the knowledge of His Gospel, were doubly wicked — and yet all under the outward appearance of true piety and holiness.

Let Paul's words stand as they are — true and effective, not dressed up or counterfeit: this present age is evil. Do not be impressed by the many excellent virtues appearing in great numbers of people, or by the great show of holiness in hypocrites. Instead, mark what Paul says, and from his words boldly and freely pronounce this verdict against the world: that the world with all its wisdom, power, and righteousness is the kingdom of the devil, out of which God alone is able to deliver us through His only begotten Son.

Therefore let us praise God the Father and give Him heartfelt thanks for this immeasurable mercy — that He has delivered us out of the kingdom of the devil, in which we were held captive, by His own Son, when it was impossible for us to do it by our own strength. And let us acknowledge with Paul that all our works and righteousness — with which we could not make the devil budge even a hair's breadth — are nothing but loss and garbage. Let us also cast underfoot and utterly reject all confidence in free will, all Pharisaical wisdom and righteousness, all religious orders, all masses, ceremonies, vows, fastings, and the like, as the most de-

filed rag and the most dangerous poison of the devil. On the contrary, let us exalt and magnify the glory of Christ, who by His death has delivered us not merely out of a world, but out of an evil world.

By the word "evil," Paul shows that the kingdom of the world — the devil's kingdom — is a kingdom of wickedness, ignorance, error, sin, death, blasphemy, despair, and everlasting damnation. On the other side, the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of justice, light, grace, forgiveness of sins, peace, consolation, healing, and everlasting life — into which we have been transferred by our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 4. According to the will of God our Father.

Here Paul arranges every word so that each one fights against the false apostles on behalf of the article of justification. Christ, he says, has delivered us from this most wicked kingdom of the devil and the world. And He did this according to the will, good pleasure, and command of the Father. Therefore we are not delivered by our own will or effort, nor by our own wisdom or planning, but because God had mercy on us and loved us — as it is written elsewhere: "In this the love of God was revealed among us, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Our deliverance from this present evil world is purely by grace and not by any merit of our own. Paul is so abundant and so forceful in amplifying and exalting the grace of God that he directs every single word against the false apostles.

There is also another reason why Paul mentions the will of the Father here — which is made clear in many places in John's Gospel, where Christ, commending His office, calls us back to His Father's will, so that in His words and works we should look not so

much at Him as at the Father. For Christ came into the world and took on human nature in order to become the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and so to reconcile us to God the Father — to declare to us alone that this was done through the good pleasure of His Father, so that by fixing our eyes on Christ we might be drawn and led straight to the Father.

For we must not think — as I have warned you before — that anything concerning God can be known to our salvation through curious prying into His majesty. Rather, it comes through taking hold of Christ, who according to the Father's will gave Himself to death for our sins. When you recognize this as the will of God in Christ, then wrath ceases, fear and trembling vanish, and God appears as nothing other than merciful — the One whose sovereign purpose was that His Son should die for us, so that we might live through Him. This knowledge makes the heart glad, so that it firmly believes God is not angry but loves us wretched sinners so much that He gave His only begotten Son for us. It is not for nothing, therefore, that Paul repeats so often and so insistently that Christ was given for our sins, and that this was done by the good will of the Father. In contrast, the curious prying into God's majesty and His dreadful judgments — reflecting on how He destroyed the whole world with the flood, how He destroyed Sodom, and similar things — is very dangerous, for it drives people to despair and casts them headlong into complete destruction, as I have shown before.

Verse 4. Of God and our Father.

The word "our" must be read with both nouns, so that the meaning is: of our God and of our Father. Then Christ's Father and our Father are one and the same. As Christ says to Mary

Magdalene in John 20: "Go to My brothers and say to them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God." Therefore God is our Father and our God — but through Christ. This is an apostolic turn of phrase and Paul's own style — not using fine or ornate words, but always purposeful, fitting, and full of burning zeal.

Verse 5. To whom be glory forever and ever.

The Hebrews were in the habit of weaving praise and thanksgiving into their writings. The apostles themselves, including Paul, followed this custom, as we see very often in his letters. The name of the Lord ought to be held in great reverence and never mentioned without praise and thanksgiving. To do so is itself a form of worship and service to God. Just as in worldly matters, when we mention the names of kings or princes we do so with some fitting gesture, reverence, and bowing of the knee — how much more when we speak of God ought we to bow the knee of our heart and name the name of God with thankfulness and great reverence.

Verse 6. I marvel.

Here you see how Paul handles the Galatians, who had fallen away and been led astray by the false apostles. He does not attack them at the outset with harsh and severe words, but deals with them in a very fatherly way — not only patiently bearing with their fall but in a sense even making excuses for it. Furthermore he shows a motherly tenderness toward them and speaks to them with great gentleness, yet in such a way that he still rebukes them — though with perfectly chosen and wisely measured words. In contrast, he is extremely heated and full of indignation against the false apostles who seduced them, laying the full fault at their door.

And so, right at the opening of the epistle, he bursts out in plain thunder and lightning against them. "If anyone preaches any other gospel than the one you have received," he says, "let him be accursed." And later in chapter five he threatens condemnation on them: "He who troubles you will bear his judgment, whoever he may be." Moreover he curses them with terrible words, saying: "I wish those who are troubling you would mutilate themselves." These are dreadful thunderclaps against the righteousness of the flesh and of the law.

Paul could have handled the Galatians more harshly and attacked them more roughly, saying something like: "Shame on your apostasy. I am ashamed of you. Your ingratitude grieves me. I am angry with you." Or he could have cried out against them more dramatically: "O wicked world, O shameful dealings," and so on. But since his aim was to raise up the fallen and with fatherly care to call them back from their error to the purity of the Gospel, he set aside those harsh and cutting words — especially at the opening — and spoke to them most gently and mildly. For since he was going about to heal people who were wounded, it was not fitting to irritate their fresh wounds further by pressing a sharp and caustic remedy into them, which would harm rather than heal. Therefore of all the gentle and mild words available, he could not have chosen any better than this: "I marvel" — by which he signals both that he is grieved and that it displeases him that they have fallen away.

Paul is following here his own rule, which he gives later in chapter six: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, keeping watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." We must fol-

low this same example, showing toward those who are misled the same affection that parents show toward their children — so that they may perceive our fatherly and motherly care toward them, and see that we seek not their destruction but their wellbeing. But as for the devil and his ministers — the originators of false doctrine and divisive movements — against them we should, following the example of the apostle, be intolerant, bold, sharp, and direct, detecting and condemning their false tricks and deceptions with all possible rigor and severity. So parents, when their child is bitten and hurt by a dog, direct their anger entirely at the dog — while the weeping child they comfort and speak to gently and soothingly.

The spirit in Paul is a remarkable craftsman in handling the afflicted consciences of those who have fallen. The pope, by contrast — being driven by a wicked spirit — breaks out violently like a tyrant and unleashes his thunderous pronouncements and curses against the miserable and troubled in conscience. This can be seen in his official decrees, and especially in that decree regarding the Lord's Supper. The bishops do no better. They do not teach the Gospel and are not concerned about the salvation of souls — they seek only authority and sovereignty over people, and everything they say and do is directed toward maintaining that. All the vainglorious scholars and teachers are affected in the same way.

Verse 6. So soon.

Here you see how Paul himself acknowledges that falling and straying in faith is an easy thing. On this account he warns Christians in another place: let him who thinks he stands take care that he does not fall. We prove every day by experience how hard it is for the human mind to grasp and hold a sure and steadfast faith, and with what great difficulty a sound congregation is built up for

the Lord. A man may labor for ten years to get some small church properly and devoutly ordered — and when it is finally in order, some reckless person, an entirely unlearned fool who knows nothing but how to slander sincere preachers of the word, creeps in and in one moment overturns everything. Who would not be deeply troubled by such wickedness?

By God's grace we have established here at Wittenberg the pattern of a Christian congregation. The word is purely taught among us, the sacraments are rightly used, exhortations and prayers are made for all estates of life, and in short everything proceeds in good order. Some reckless spirit could quickly stop this happy progress of the Gospel and in a single moment overturn what we have built with great labor over many years. The same thing happened to Paul, God's chosen vessel. He had established the churches of Galatia with great care and effort — and yet hardly had he stepped out the door, so to speak, before the false apostles began overthrowing some of them, whose fall then caused great ruin throughout the Galatian churches. Such a sudden and great loss was undoubtedly more bitter to the apostle than death. Therefore let us watch carefully — each one first for himself, and then all teachers not only for themselves but for the whole church — so that we do not fall into temptation.

Since the church is such a tender and fragile thing, and is so easily overturned, we must watch alertly against these fanatical spirits. After hearing a few sermons or reading a few pages of Holy Scripture, they immediately set themselves up as masters and critics of all learners and teachers, against every proper authority. Many such people can be found today among tradesmen — bold and presumptuous people who have never been tested by tempta-

tion, have never learned to fear God, and have never had any real taste or experience of grace. Because they lack the Holy Spirit, they teach whatever pleases themselves and whatever appeals to the common crowd. The untrained masses, eager for something new, quickly attach themselves to such men. And even some who think they are well grounded in the doctrine of faith, and who have in some measure been tried by temptation, are led astray by them.

Since Paul therefore from his own experience can teach us that congregations won by great labor are easily and quickly overthrown, we ought with special vigilance to watch against the devil who ranges everywhere — lest he come while we sleep and sow weeds among the wheat. For however watchful and diligent the shepherds may be, the Christian flock is still in danger from Satan. Paul, as I said, had planted churches in Galatia with exceptional care and diligence — and yet he had scarcely set foot out the door before the false apostles had overturned some of them, whose fall afterward caused great ruin in the churches of Galatia. This sudden and devastating loss was without doubt more bitter to the apostle than death itself. Therefore let us watch carefully — each one first for himself, and then all teachers not only for themselves but for the whole church — so that we do not fall into temptation.

Verse 6. You are removed away.

Here again Paul uses not a harsh word but a most gentle one. He does not say "I marvel that you have slid back so soon" or "that you are so disobedient, fickle, inconstant, and ungrateful" — but that "you are so soon removed." As if to say: you are entirely victims here. For you have done no harm — you have suffered and received harm. Therefore, in order to call back those who have strayed, he blames those who did the removing rather than those

who were removed — yet he also gently reproves the latter when he says they were removed. As if to say: "Although I embrace you with fatherly affection and know that you were deceived not by your own fault but by the fault of these false apostles, still I could wish that you had grown up a little more in the strength of sound doctrine. You did not hold firmly enough to the word. You did not root yourselves deeply enough in it — and that is why the slightest wind has carried you away." Jerome believed that Paul intended to play on the name of the Galatians by alluding to the Hebrew word galath, which means fallen or carried away. As if to say: you are true Galatians in both name and deed — fallen and removed. Some think that we Germans are descended from the Galatians. This may well be true. For we Germans are not much unlike them in temperament. I myself am compelled to wish my countrymen more steadfastness and constancy. In everything we do, we are intensely enthusiastic at the start — but once that first burst of feeling cools, we quickly grow slack. With the same impulsiveness with which we begin things, we abandon and utterly reject them.

At first, when the light of the Gospel began to appear after such great darkness of human traditions, many people were zealously devoted to godliness. They eagerly attended sermons and held the ministers of God's word in reverence. But now that the doctrine of godliness has been happily reformed, with such great increase of the word of God, many who previously seemed earnest disciples have become despisers and outright enemies. They have not only cast off their zeal for the word of God and contempt for its ministers, but also hate all sound learning and have become plain gluttons and pleasure-seekers — truly worthy to be compared to those foolish and inconstant Galatians.

Verse 6. From Him who called you in the grace of Christ.

This passage is somewhat ambiguous and therefore carries a double meaning. The first reading is: from that Christ who called you in grace. The second is: from Him — that is, from God — who called you in the grace of Christ. I prefer the first reading. For it pleases me that just as Paul a little earlier made Christ the Redeemer who by His death delivers us from this present evil age, and the giver of grace and peace equally with God the Father, so he should also make Him here the One who called us in grace. For Paul's chief purpose is to impress on our minds the gift of Christ, through whom we come to the Father.

There is also great force in the words "from Him who called us in grace." In them is also an implied contrast. As if to say: "How easily do you let yourselves be drawn away from Christ, who has called you — not as Moses did, into the law, works, sin, wrath, and condemnation, but entirely into grace." We make the same complaint as Paul today — that the blindness and stubbornness of people is alarming, in that no one will receive the doctrine of grace and salvation. Or if any do receive it, they quickly slide back and fall from it — even though it brings with it all good things, both spiritual and bodily: forgiveness of sins, true righteousness, peace of conscience, and everlasting life. Moreover it brings clear light and sound judgment concerning all kinds of doctrine and ways of life. It approves and upholds civil government, household government, and every way of life ordained and appointed by God. It uproots all doctrines of error, sedition, and confusion. It removes the fear of sin and death. In short, it exposes all the cunning schemes and works of the devil, and opens up to us the grace and love of

God in Christ. What in the world causes people to hate this word — this glad news of everlasting comfort, grace, salvation, and eternal life — so bitterly, and to persecute it with such hellish fury?

Paul earlier called this present world evil and wicked — the kingdom of the devil. For if it were not so, it would acknowledge the grace and mercy of God. But since it is under the dominion of the devil, it recklessly and defiantly despises and persecutes these things, preferring darkness, error, and the devil's kingdom to the light, truth, and kingdom of Christ. And it does this not through ignorance or mistake, but through the malice of the devil. This is sufficiently clear from the fact that Christ the Son of God, by giving Himself to death for the sins of all people, has gained nothing from this perverse and ruined world except that it blasphemes Him for this immeasurable gift, persecutes His life-giving word, and would gladly nail Him to the cross again if it could. Therefore the world does not merely dwell in darkness — it is darkness itself, as it is written in the first chapter of John.

Paul therefore amplifies the words "from Christ who has called you," as if to say: "My preaching was not the harsh law of Moses, and I did not teach that you should be slaves under the yoke. Rather, I preached the pure doctrine of grace and freedom from the law, sin, death, the devil, and damnation — that is, that Christ has graciously called you in grace, so that you should be free people under Christ, not slaves under Moses. But Moses' disciples are exactly what you have become again through your false apostles, who by the law of Moses have called you not to grace but to wrath, to the hatred of God, to sin and death. But Christ's call brings grace and saving health. For those who are called by Him, instead of the law that produces sorrow, receive the glad news of the

Gospel, and are transferred from God's wrath to His favor, from sin into righteousness, from death into life. And will you allow yourselves to be led — yes, so quickly and so easily — away from such a living fountain full of grace and life? If Moses brings people to God's wrath and sin through the law of God, where does the pope's own traditions lead them?" The other reading — that the Father calls us in the grace of Christ — is also good, but the former reading about Christ is more directly suited to comforting troubled consciences.

Verse 6. To another gospel.

Here we may learn to recognize the cunning tricks and subtleties of the devil. No heretic comes under the banner of error and the devil. The devil himself does not come in his own form as a devil — especially not that white devil we spoke of earlier. Even the black devil, who drives people to open wickedness, provides them with a cover to conceal the sin they commit or plan to commit. The murderer in his rage does not see that murder is as great and terrible a sin as it truly is, because he has a cover to hide it. Fornicators, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, and such others all have ways to flatter themselves and conceal their sins. So even the black devil always appears disguised and in costume in all his works and schemes. But in spiritual matters, where Satan comes out — not black but white, in the likeness of an angel or of God Himself — he surpasses all his other performances with the most cunning disguise and remarkable deception, and is in the habit of selling his most deadly poison as the doctrine of grace, as the word of God, as the Gospel of Christ. For this reason Paul calls the doctrine of the false apostles, Satan's ministers, a "gospel" — but says it with con-

tempt. As if to say: you Galatians now have other evangelists and another gospel. My Gospel is now despised by you and is no longer held in honor among you.

From this it can easily be concluded that these false apostles had discredited Paul's Gospel among the Galatians, saying: "Paul indeed made a good beginning — but making a good beginning is not enough, for there remain yet many higher matters." As they say in Acts 15: it is not enough to believe in Christ or to be baptized — you must also be circumcised. "Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." This is the same as saying: Christ is a good builder who has indeed begun a building, but He has not finished it — that must be done by Moses.

So today, when the fanatical Anabaptists and others cannot openly condemn us, they say: "These Lutherans have a spirit of timidity — they don't dare to freely and boldly declare the full truth and follow it through. They have indeed laid a foundation — they have taught faith in Christ well — but the beginning, middle, and end must be joined together. God has not given this to them, but has reserved it for us." In this way these perverse and devilish spirits promote and advance their own corrupt teachings, calling them the word of God, and so deceive many under the covering of God's name. For the devil does not want to appear ugly and black in his ministers — he wants to appear fair and white. And to appear so, he dresses all his words and works in the colors of truth and the name of God. From this has come the common German proverb: All mischief begins in God's name.

Let us therefore learn that this is one of the devil's special strategies: if he cannot harm by persecuting and destroying, he does it under the cover of correcting and building up. So today he

persecutes us with force and the sword, hoping that once we are removed and destroyed, he can not merely obscure the Gospel but utterly overthrow it. But so far he has accomplished nothing by this method. He has slain many who steadfastly confessed our doctrine to be holy and heavenly — and through their blood, the church has not been destroyed but watered. Since he has gained nothing that way, he stirs up wicked spirits and ungodly teachers who at first approve of our doctrine and teach it with apparent agreement with us. But afterward they claim that it is our calling to teach only the first principles of Christian doctrine, while the deeper mysteries of Scripture have been revealed to them directly from above by God Himself — and that they have been called to open these mysteries to the world. This is how the devil hinders the progress of the Gospel on both sides — on the left by persecuting and killing, but even more on the right (as I said earlier) by building and correcting.

Therefore we must pray without ceasing, read Holy Scripture, and cling firmly to Christ and His holy word, so that we may overcome the devil's cunning and subtleties with which he attacks us on both sides. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Verse 7. Which is not another gospel, but there are some who trouble you.

Here again he excuses the Galatians and attacks the false apostles with great bitterness. As if to say: "You Galatians have been led to believe that the gospel you received from me is not the true and genuine gospel, and so you think you are doing well to receive the

new gospel the false apostles are teaching, as though it were better than mine. I do not lay this fault so much on you as on those disturbers who trouble your consciences and pull you out of my hands." Here you see again how hot and forceful he is against these deceivers, and with what sharp words he portrays them — calling them troublers of the churches, who do nothing but lead astray and deceive countless poor consciences, causing terrible harm and ruin in the congregations. We are compelled to see this same great harm in our own day, to the great grief of our hearts, and yet we are no more able to remedy it than Paul was in his time.

This passage shows that the false apostles had accused Paul of being an imperfect apostle and a weak and mistaken preacher. Here in turn he calls them troublers of the churches and destroyers of the Gospel of Christ. So they condemned each other. The false apostles condemned Paul, and Paul in turn condemned the false apostles. This kind of contention and mutual condemnation has always existed in the church, especially when the doctrine of the Gospel has been flourishing — that is, wicked teachers persecute, condemn, and suppress the godly, while the godly in turn rebuke and condemn the wicked.

The papists and boastful spirits today hate us intensely and condemn our doctrine as wicked and mistaken. Moreover they scheme against our property and our lives. And we in turn, with a thorough hatred, reject and condemn their wicked and blasphemous doctrine. In the meantime the ordinary people are at a standstill, wavering back and forth, uncertain and unsure which way to lean or whom they may safely follow. This is because not

everyone has been given the ability to judge Christianly in such great and weighty matters. But the end will show which side teaches truly, and which of them rightly condemns the other.

What is certain is this: we persecute no one, oppress no one, put no one to death, and our doctrine does not trouble people's consciences but delivers them from countless errors and the devil's snares. For the truth of this we have the testimony of many good people who give thanks to God because through our doctrine they have received sure and certain comfort for their consciences. Therefore, just as in Paul's time the trouble in the churches was not his fault but the fault of the false apostles — so today it is not our fault, but the fault of the Anabaptists and such fanatical spirits, that such great and widespread troubles exist in the church.

Mark this carefully: every teacher of works and the righteousness of the law is a troubler of the church and of people's consciences. And who would ever have believed that the pope, cardinals, bishops, monks, and that whole assembly of Satan — especially the founders of those holy religious orders, though God may by a miracle have saved some of them — were troublers of consciences? In truth they are far worse than those false apostles. For the false apostles taught that besides faith in Christ, the works of the law of God were also necessary for salvation. But the papists, setting aside faith, have taught human traditions and works not commanded by God but invented by themselves, contrary to the word of God — and they have not only made these equal to the word of God but have elevated them far above it. And the more holy a heretic appears outwardly, the more harm he does. For if the false apostles had not possessed notable gifts, great authority, and an appearance of holiness, and had not boasted of being

Christ's ministers, the apostles' disciples, and sincere preachers of the Gospel, they could not so easily have undermined Paul's authority and led the Galatians astray.

The reason Paul attacks them so sharply — calling them troublers of the churches — is that besides faith in Christ, they taught that circumcision and the keeping of the law were necessary for salvation. Paul himself testifies to this in chapter five below. And Luke in Acts 15 records the same thing in these words: that certain people who came down from Judea taught the brothers, saying: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

The false apostles therefore argued most earnestly and stubbornly that the law must be observed. The stubborn Jews immediately joined themselves to them and so afterward easily persuaded those who were not firmly grounded in the faith that Paul was not a sincere teacher, since he had no regard for the law but preached a doctrine that abolished and overthrew it. It seemed to them a very strange thing that the law of God should be entirely set aside, and that the Jews — who had always up to that time been counted the people of God, to whom the promises were made — should now be rejected. And it seemed stranger still that the Gentiles, being wicked idolaters, should attain this glory and dignity of being the people of God without circumcision, without the works of the law, by grace alone and faith in Christ.

The false apostles exploited all these things to the fullest, in order to stir up hatred of Paul among the Galatians. And to turn them more sharply against him, they said that he preached freedom from the law to the Gentiles in order to bring the law of God into contempt and utterly abolish it — contrary to the law of God,

contrary to the custom of the Jewish nation, contrary to the example of the apostles, and contrary even to his own example. Therefore he should be avoided as an open blasphemer against God and a rebel against the entire commonwealth of the Jews. They said their own teaching should be followed instead, since besides preaching the Gospel rightly, they were the very disciples of the apostles — with whom Paul had never even associated. By this scheme they discredited and undermined Paul among the Galatians — and because of their perverse dealings, Paul is absolutely compelled with all his might to stand up against these false apostles, whom he boldly reproaches and condemns, calling them troublers of the churches and destroyers of the Gospel of Christ, as follows:

Verse 7. And intends to pervert the gospel of Christ.

That is to say, they do not merely intend to trouble you — they intend to utterly abolish and overthrow the Gospel of Christ. For these are the two things the devil busily pursues. First, he is not content with troubling and deceiving many through his false apostles — he also works through them to utterly overthrow the Gospel, and never rests until he has accomplished it. Yet the very people who pervert the Gospel are the least willing of all to hear that they are the devil's apostles. On the contrary, they glory above all others in the name of Christ and boast of being the most sincere preachers of the Gospel.

But because they mix the law and the Gospel together, they cannot help being perverters of the Gospel. For either Christ must remain and the law perish, or the law must remain and Christ perish — the two cannot agree and reign together in the conscience. Where the righteousness of the law rules, the righteousness of

grace cannot rule. And where the righteousness of grace reigns, the righteousness of the law cannot reign — one of them must give way to the other. And if you cannot believe that God will forgive your sins for the sake of Christ, whom He sent into the world to be our High Priest — then how, I ask, will you believe that He will forgive them for the works of the law, which you have never been able to perform? Or for your own works, which — as you must admit — are such that it is impossible for them to stand before the judgment of God?

Therefore the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the law cannot coexist. One must simply be rejected and set aside, and the other confirmed and established. For as Paul says here, to mix the one with the other is to overthrow the Gospel of Christ. And yet when it comes to debate, the larger side overcomes the better one. For Christ and His side are weak, and the Gospel is nothing but a foolish form of preaching. In contrast, the kingdom of the world and the devil who rules it are strong. And besides that, the wisdom and righteousness of the flesh have a fine appearance. So the righteousness of grace and faith is pushed aside, while the righteousness of the law and works is advanced and maintained. But this is our comfort: the devil with all his members cannot do what he would. He may trouble many, but he cannot overthrow the Gospel of Christ. Truth may be attacked and may be put in danger, but it cannot perish. It may be assailed, but it cannot be defeated — for the word of the Lord endures forever.

It may seem like a small thing to mix the law and the Gospel, faith and works together. But it does more harm than human reason can conceive. It does not merely cloud and darken the knowledge of grace — it also takes away Christ with all His benefits, and

completely overthrows the Gospel, as Paul says in this place. The cause of this great evil is our flesh, which — being sunk in sins — sees no way out except by works, and therefore wants to live in the righteousness of the law and rest in confidence in its own works. It is therefore entirely ignorant of the doctrine of faith and grace, without which it is impossible for the conscience to find rest and quiet.

It also appears from Paul's words — "who intend to pervert the Gospel of Christ" — that the false apostles were exceptionally bold and shameless in opposing Paul with all their strength. Therefore Paul, filled with a spirit of zeal and fervor, and fully confident of the certainty of his calling, sets himself strongly against them and magnificently defends his ministry, saying:

Verse 8. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Here Paul hurls flames of fire, and his zeal is so intense that he nearly begins to curse even the angels. "Even if we ourselves," he says, "— even I, Timothy, Titus, and all who teach Christ purely along with me (I am not speaking of those who trouble consciences) — yes, even if an angel from heaven were to preach to you something different — I would rather have myself, my brothers, and even the very angels from heaven be accursed, than have my Gospel overthrown." This is indeed a passionate zeal — that he dares so boldly to place under the curse not only himself and his brothers but even an angel from heaven.

The Greek word anathema, in Hebrew herem, means something accursed, detestable, and set apart — having nothing to do with, no participation in, and no communion with God. So Joshua declared that the city of Jericho should be permanently under the curse and never rebuilt. And the last chapter of Leviticus states that nothing devoted — that is, set apart by vow from common use — shall be redeemed, but must die, whether man or beast. So God had ordained that Amalek and certain other cities, placed under the curse by God's own decree, should be utterly razed and destroyed. This then is Paul's meaning: I would rather that myself, my brothers, and even an angel from heaven be accursed, than that we or anyone else preach any gospel other than the one we have already preached. Paul puts himself under the curse first — for skilled craftsmen are accustomed to first find fault with themselves, so that they may afterward reprove others all the more freely and sharply.

Paul therefore concludes that there is no other Gospel besides the one he himself preached. But the Gospel he preached was not one he devised himself — it is the same Gospel God promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (Romans 1). Therefore he declares himself and others — even an angel from heaven — to be assuredly under the curse if they teach anything contrary to this first Gospel. For the voice of the Gospel, once sent forth, will not be called back until the day of judgment.

Verse 9. As we said before, so I say again now: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be accursed.

He repeats the very same thing, only changing the persons. Before, he placed himself, his brothers, and an angel from heaven under the curse. Here he says: if there is anyone else besides us who preaches to you any other gospel than what you received from us, let them also be accursed. So he plainly excommunicates and places under the curse all teachers everywhere — himself, his brothers, an angel, and beyond that all others without exception, namely the false teachers who are his adversaries. Here the apostle shows a remarkable intensity of spirit — daring to curse all teachers throughout the whole world and in heaven who pervert his Gospel and teach anything else. For all people must either believe the Gospel Paul preached, or they must be accursed and condemned. Would to God that this terrible sentence of the apostle might strike fear into the hearts of those who today seek to pervert Paul's Gospel — and of such people the world today, more's the pity, is full.

The change in persons here deserves to be noticed. Paul's words in the first curse are somewhat different from those in the second. In the first he says: "If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you." In the second: "contrary to what you have received." He does this deliberately, lest the Galatians should say: "O Paul, we have not perverted the gospel you preached — we just did not understand you properly, but the teachers who came after you have now explained its true meaning." This, says Paul, he will not allow. They must not add to it or correct it. What you heard from me is the pure word of God — let that alone stand. I have no desire to be a different kind of teacher than I was, nor do I want you to be different disciples. Therefore if anyone comes to you preaching any

other gospel than what you heard from me, or boasting that he will give you something better than what you received from me — let him and his hearers both be accursed.

The first two chapters contain little else but defenses of Paul's doctrine and refutations of errors. It is not until the end of chapter two that he at last begins to handle the article of justification. Nevertheless, this passage of Paul should warn us: all those who regard the pope as the judge of Holy Scripture are under the curse. This is what the pope's theologians have wickedly taught, standing on this argument: "The church has approved only four Gospels, therefore there are only four. If she had approved more, there would be more. Since the church could receive and approve as many Gospels as she wished, the church is therefore above the Gospel." A fine argument indeed. "I approve the Scripture, therefore I am above the Scripture." "John the Baptist acknowledged and confessed Christ and pointed to Him with his finger, therefore he is above Christ." "The church approves the Christian faith and doctrine, therefore the church is above them." For the overthrowing of this wicked and blasphemous doctrine against God, you have here a plain text like a thunderbolt, in which Paul places both himself and an angel from heaven, and all doctors on earth, and all other teachers and masters of every kind, under the authority of Scripture. For they are not to be masters, judges, or arbiters — only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of the church — whether it be the pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, or an angel from heaven. No doctrine is to be taught or heard in the church besides the word of God — that is, Holy Scripture. Otherwise let both the teachers and hearers be accursed along with their doctrine.

Verse 10. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?

These words are spoken with the same intensity as the ones before. As if to say: Am I, Paul, so unknown among you — I who have preached so openly in your churches? Are my bitter conflicts and so many fierce battles against the Jews still unknown to you? Surely my preaching, and all the great afflictions I have suffered, make it plainly evident whether I am seeking to please men or God. For everyone can see that by my preaching I have not only stirred up persecution against myself everywhere, but have also brought on myself the bitter hatred of my own nation and of all other people. I therefore make it plain enough that I seek through my preaching not the favor or approval of men, but to set forth the goodness and glory of God.

Neither do we — without any boasting — seek the favor of men through our doctrine. For we teach that all people are by nature wicked and children of wrath. We condemn human free will, human strength, wisdom, and righteousness, and all religion of our own devising. In short, we say that there is nothing in us that is able to deserve grace and the forgiveness of sins. Rather, we preach that we receive this grace through the free mercy of God alone, for Christ's sake. For in this way the heavens declare the glory of God and His works, condemning all people generally along with their works. This is certainly not preaching for the favor of people and the world. For the world can tolerate nothing less than hearing its wisdom, righteousness, religion, and power condemned. To speak against those mighty and glorious gifts the world prizes is not to flatter the world but to stir up its hatred and

indignation. For if we speak against people or against anything that belongs to their glory, then cruel hatred, persecution, excommunication, murder, and condemnation must inevitably follow.

If then, says Paul, they can see other things clearly, why cannot they also see this — that I teach the things that are from God and not from men? That is, I seek no one's favor through my doctrine, but I set forth God's mercy offered to us in Christ. For if I were seeking the favor of men, I would not condemn their works. But since I do condemn men's works — that is, since I declare God's judgment from His word (of which I am a minister) against all people, showing that they are sinners, unrighteous, wicked, children of wrath, slaves of the devil, and condemned, and that they are not made righteous by works or by circumcision, but by grace alone and faith in Christ — I stir up against myself the deadly hatred of men. For there is nothing they can endure less than to be described this way. On the contrary, they want to be praised as wise, righteous, and holy. This, therefore, is sufficient proof that I am not teaching human doctrine. Christ speaks in the same way in John 7: "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify about it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). And in John 3: "This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (John 3:19).

That I teach what comes from God, says the apostle, is clear enough from this: that I preach the grace, goodness, and glory of God alone. Moreover, whoever says what his Lord and Master has commanded him, and glorifies not himself but the One whose messenger he is, brings and teaches the true word of God. I teach only what has been commanded me from above, and I glorify not

myself but the One who sent me. Beyond that, I stir up against myself the wrath and indignation of both Jews and Gentiles. Therefore my doctrine is true, pure, certain, and from God — and there can be no other doctrine, still less any better one, than mine. Therefore any doctrine that does not teach as mine does — that all people are sinners and are justified by faith alone in Christ — must be false, wicked, blasphemous, accursed, and devilish. And the same is true of all who either teach such doctrine or receive it.

So we, along with Paul, boldly and confidently declare every doctrine that differs from ours to be accursed and abominable. For we do not seek through our preaching the praise of men or the favor of princes or bishops, but the favor of God alone, whose grace and mercy alone we preach, despising and rejecting everything that comes from ourselves. Whoever teaches any other gospel, or anything contrary to ours, we are bold to say is sent by the devil — let him be accursed.

Verse 10. Or am I seeking to please people?

That is: am I serving men or God? He always has the false apostles in view. These men, he says, must necessarily seek to please and flatter people, because by doing so they gain glory for themselves in the flesh. And moreover, because they will not endure men's hatred and persecution, they teach circumcision — simply to avoid the persecution of the cross of Christ, as he says in chapter five.

Today too you can find many who labor to please men, and in order to live in peace and bodily security they teach human doctrine — that is, wicked things — or else they approve the blasphemies and wicked opinions of the adversaries, against the word

of God and against their own conscience, just to keep the favor of princes and bishops and to preserve their goods. But we, because we strive to please God and not men, stir up against ourselves the malice of the devil and of hell itself. We bear the reproaches and slanders of the world, death, and every kind of harm that can be done against us.

So Paul says here: I am not seeking to please men so that they will praise my doctrine and report me as an excellent teacher. I want only my doctrine to please God — and by this I make men my mortal enemies. I find this to be most true by experience: they repay me with disgrace, slander, imprisonment, and the sword. In contrast, the false apostles teach what comes from men — things that are pleasant and appealing to human reason — and they do so in order to live at ease and win the favor, goodwill, and praise of the people. And they find what they are looking for. They are praised and magnified by people. So Christ says in Matthew 6:2 that hypocrites do all things to be seen and praised by people. And in John 5:44 He sharply rebukes such people: "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" The things Paul has taught so far amount mainly to illustrations. Nevertheless he is earnest throughout in proving that his doctrine is genuine and sincere. Therefore he urges the Galatians not to abandon it for any other doctrine.

Verse 10. For if I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

All of this is to be understood in relation to Paul's whole office and ministry — to show what a contrast there was between his former conduct under Jewish law and his present conduct under the

Gospel. As if to say: Do you think I am still trying to please men, as I did in former days? He speaks similarly in chapter five: "If I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" As if to say: Do you not see and hear of my daily conflicts, my great persecutions and afflictions? From the time I was converted and called to the office of apostleship, I have never taught human doctrine, and I have never sought to please men, but God only. That is: I seek through my ministry and doctrine not the praise and favor of men, but of God.

Here again it is worth noting how maliciously and craftily the false apostles worked to bring Paul into hatred among the Galatians. They pulled out of his preachings and writings certain apparent contradictions — as our adversaries today do from our books — and by this means tried to prove that he had taught contradictory things. On this basis they said no credit should be given to him, and that circumcision and the law ought to be kept. As evidence, they pointed to Paul's own example: he had circumcised Timothy according to the law, had purified himself with four other men in the temple at Jerusalem, and had shaved his head at Cenchrea. These critics assumed that Paul had done these things because he was compelled to by the authority and command of the apostles. In reality he had observed these practices as matters of indifference, accommodating the weakness of brothers who did not yet understand Christian freedom, so that they would not be offended. To their criticisms he responds: the matter itself makes sufficiently clear how true is what the false apostles fabricate against me to overthrow my Gospel and restore the law and cir-

cumcision. For if I were willing to preach the law and circumcision, and to commend the strength, power, and will of man, I would not be so hated by them — I would please them enormously.

Verses 11-12. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here is the main point of the whole matter — a refutation of his adversaries and a defense of his doctrine that extends to the end of chapter two. This is what he presses, this is what he stands on, and he confirms it with an oath: that he did not learn his Gospel from any human being, but received it by the revelation of Jesus Christ. He swears to it because he is compelled to do so — so that the Galatians may believe him, and also so that they will give no ear to the false apostles, whom he reproves as liars for having claimed that Paul learned and received his Gospel from the apostles.

When Paul says his Gospel is not man's gospel, he does not mean that it is not earthly — that would be obvious on its face, and the false apostles also boasted that their doctrine was not earthly but heavenly. He means that he did not learn his Gospel through the ministry of men or receive it by any earthly means — as all of us learn it either through the ministry of others or by some earthly means: some by hearing, some by reading, some by writing. He received it solely through the revelation of Jesus Christ. If anyone wishes to make a further distinction here, I have no objection. The apostle shows in passing that Christ is not only man, but both truly God and truly man, when he says that he received his Gospel not through man.

Paul received his Gospel on the road to Damascus, where Christ appeared to him and spoke with him. Afterward Christ also spoke with him in the temple at Jerusalem — but he received the Gospel on the road, as Luke records in Acts 9. "Rise," Christ said, "and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." He did not tell him to go into the city to learn the Gospel from Ananias. Rather, Ananias was told to go and baptize Paul, to lay hands on him, to commit the ministry of the word to him, and to commend him to the church — not to teach him the Gospel, which Paul had already received (as he states here) through the revelation of Jesus Christ alone. Ananias himself confirms this, saying: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me so that you may regain your sight." Therefore Paul did not receive his doctrine from Ananias. Having already been called, enlightened, and taught by Christ on the road, he was sent to Ananias so that he might also have the confirmation of human witnesses — that he had been called by God to preach the Gospel of Christ.

Paul was compelled to recount all of this to remove the slander of the false apostles, who labored to stir up hatred of him among the Galatians by saying that Paul was inferior to the disciples of the other apostles — who had received from the apostles what they taught and preserved, whose company they had enjoyed for a long time, and whom Paul himself had also received from, even though he now denied it. Why then, they asked, would anyone obey one who was their inferior rather than the authority of the apostles themselves, who were not only the original elders and teachers of the Galatians but of all the churches throughout the whole world?

This argument, which the false apostles built on the authority of the apostles, was strong and powerful — so powerful that the Galatians were suddenly overthrown by it, especially on this point. I would never have believed — had I not been taught by the examples of the churches of Galatia, of the Corinthians, and others — that those who had received the word of God with such joy at the beginning, among whom were many notable people, could be overthrown so quickly. O Lord God, what horrible and immeasurable harm even one single argument can easily do when it so pierces a person's conscience that — God's grace being withdrawn — he loses everything in a single moment. By this cunning pretense, then, the false apostles deceived the Galatians, who were not yet firmly established and grounded but still weak in faith.

Furthermore, the matter of justification is fragile — not in itself, for in itself it is most sure and certain — but as it pertains to us. I have good personal experience of this. I know in what dark hours I sometimes wrestle. I know how often I suddenly lose the light of the Gospel and of grace, as though thick, dark clouds have blocked them from me. In short, I know how slippery a place even those stand in who are well practiced and seem to have sure footing in matters of faith. We have good experience of this — we can teach it to others, and that is a reliable sign that we understand it. But when in the midst of actual conflict we need to use the Gospel — the word of grace, comfort, and life — the law, the word of wrath, heaviness, and death, comes rushing in ahead of the Gospel and begins to rage. The terrors it stirs up in the conscience are no less than the horrifying spectacle at Mount Sinai. So much so that even one passage of Scripture containing a threat of the law

drowns and overwhelms all other consolations, and so shakes all our inner powers that we forget justification, grace, Christ, the Gospel — everything.

Therefore, as far as we are concerned, this is a very fragile matter — because we are fragile. Moreover, we have half of ourselves working against us: our reason, and all its powers. Beyond that, the flesh resists the spirit, and cannot firmly believe that God's promises are true. It therefore fights against the spirit and — as Paul says — holds it captive, so that it cannot believe as steadfastly as it would wish. This is why we continually teach that the knowledge of Christ and of faith is not a human achievement but purely the gift of God, who as He creates faith in us also preserves it. And just as He first gives faith through the word, so afterward He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by the word. Therefore the greatest service a person can render to God, and the true Sabbath of sabbaths, is to exercise himself in true godliness — to read and hear the word diligently. Conversely, nothing is more dangerous than to grow weary of the word. The person who has grown so lukewarm that he thinks he already knows enough, and begins little by little to lose his appetite for the word, has lost Christ and the Gospel. What he thinks he knows, he holds only as a bare opinion. He is like the man James describes who looks at his face in a mirror, then goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Therefore let every faithful person labor and strive with all diligence to learn and to keep this doctrine. To that end, let him use humble and heartfelt prayer, together with continual study and meditation on the word. And however much we strive, we will always have enough to keep us occupied. For our enemies are not

small — they are strong and mighty and in constant war against us: our own flesh, all the dangers of the world, the law, sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and the devil himself, who never stops tempting us inwardly through his fiery darts and outwardly through his false apostles, seeking to overthrow, if not all of us, at least most of us.

This argument of the false apostles, then, had a fine appearance and seemed very powerful. The same kind of argument moves many people today: the apostles taught this, the holy fathers and their successors taught this, the church believes and teaches this, and besides, it is impossible that Christ would allow His church to err for such a long time. "Are you alone wiser than so many holy men? Wiser than the whole church?" In this manner the devil, transformed into an angel of light, attacks us craftily today through certain poisonous hypocrites who say: "We have no use for the pope, or for those bishops who are such persecutors and contemners of God's word. We also detest the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of monks and the like. But we want the authority of the holy church to remain unquestioned. The church has believed and taught this for a long time. So have all the doctors of the early church — holy men, older and more learned than you. Who are you, to dare to disagree with all of them and bring us a contrary doctrine?" When Satan reasons this way in league with the flesh and human reason, the conscience is terrified and utterly despairs — unless you resolutely come back to yourself and say: Whether it be Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Peter, Paul, John, or even an angel from heaven that teaches otherwise — this I know with certainty: I teach not the things of men, but of God. That is, I give all things to God and nothing to man.

When I first undertook the defense of the Gospel, I remember that Doctor Staupitz, a worthy man, said to me: "This pleases me well — the doctrine you preach gives all glory and everything else to God alone, and nothing to man. For God cannot be given too much glory, goodness, mercy, and the like." That word greatly comforted and strengthened me at the time. And it is true: the doctrine of the Gospel takes from people all glory, wisdom, righteousness, and the like, and gives them to the Creator alone, who made all things from nothing. We can also more safely give too much to God than to man. For in this matter I may boldly say: Even if the church, Augustine and other doctors, Peter and Apollo, yes even an angel from heaven teach a contrary doctrine — my doctrine is one that sets forth and preaches the grace and glory of God alone, and in the matter of salvation condemns the righteousness and wisdom of all people. In this I cannot be in error, because I am giving to both God and man exactly what truly and properly belongs to each.

But you will say: the church is holy, the fathers are holy. That is true. Yet even though the church is holy, it is still compelled to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses." And though the fathers are holy, they are still saved through the forgiveness of sins. Therefore neither I, nor the church, nor the fathers, nor the apostles, nor even an angel from heaven should be believed if we teach anything contrary to the word of God. Let the word of God abide forever. Otherwise this argument of the false apostles would have powerfully overcome Paul's doctrine. For it was indeed a great thing — a very great thing — to set before the Galatians the whole church with the company of all the apostles against Paul alone, who was newly arisen and held little authority. This was therefore a strong

argument and a forceful conclusion. For no one willingly admits that the church errs — and yet it must be said that she errs if she teaches anything beyond or contrary to the word of God.

Peter, the chief of the apostles, taught both by life and by doctrine something beyond the word of God — therefore he erred and was deceived. Paul did not overlook that error — though it appeared to be a minor one — because he saw it would harm the whole church. He opposed Peter to his face, because he was not walking in line with the truth of the Gospel. Therefore neither the church, nor Peter, nor the apostles, nor angels from heaven should be listened to unless they bring and teach the pure word of God.

This argument even today causes no small difficulty for our cause. For if we may not believe the pope, nor the fathers, nor Luther, nor anyone else unless they teach us the pure word of God — then whom shall we believe? Who in the meantime will certify our consciences which side teaches the pure word of God — we or our adversaries? For they too boast that they have the pure word of God and teach it. We do not believe the papists because they do not teach the word of God, nor can they. In turn, they hate us most bitterly and persecute us as the most pestilent heretics and deceivers of the people. What is to be done in such a case? Should every fanatical spirit be free to teach whatever he wishes, since the world can neither receive nor endure our doctrine? For though we glory with Paul that we teach the pure Gospel of Christ — to which not only the emperor, pope, and the whole world ought to give credit, but ought gladly and thankfully to receive and embrace it, diligently providing for its teaching in every place, and holding accursed anyone who teaches the contrary, whether pope, apostle, or angel from heaven — yet we gain nothing by this, but are com-

pelled to hear that our glorying is not only vain, rash, and arrogant, but devilish and full of blasphemy. But if we lower ourselves and yield to the fury of our adversaries, then both the papists and Anabaptists grow bold. The Anabaptists will boast that they are bringing and teaching something strange that the world has never heard before. The papists will reestablish and confirm their old abominations. Therefore let every person be absolutely certain of his calling and doctrine, so that he may boldly say with Paul: "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed."

Verse 13. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

This passage contains no exceptional doctrine. Nevertheless, Paul cites his own example, saying: I defended the observances of the Pharisees and the law more stubbornly than you or any of your false teachers. Therefore, if the righteousness of the law had been worth anything, I would not have turned away from it. Before I knew Christ, I so pursued it and advanced in it that I surpassed many of my contemporaries among my own people. I was so zealous in defending it that I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. Having received authority from the chief priests, I threw many into prison, I voted for their execution, and I punished them throughout all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme — and in such a rage against them I pursued them even to foreign cities.

Verse 14. And I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

He is not referring here to the Pharisaical or merely human traditions as "the traditions of my fathers," since he is not dealing with Pharisaical traditions here but with a far weightier matter. He calls the holy law of Moses itself his fathers' traditions — that is, the heritage received and handed down from the fathers. For this law, he says, I was most zealous when I was in Judaism. He speaks the same way to the Philippians: "As to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6). As if to say: In this I can boast, and compare myself with the whole nation of the Jews — yes, with the best and holiest of all those who are of the circumcision. Let them show me, if they can, a more zealous and earnest defender of the law of Moses than I have been.

This, O Galatians, ought to have kept you from believing these deceivers who make such a great show of the righteousness of the law. For if there were any reason to glory in the righteousness of the law, I have far more reason than any other.

In the same way I can speak of myself: before I was enlightened with the knowledge of the Gospel, I was as zealous for the papistical laws and the traditions of the fathers as anyone could be, most earnestly maintaining and defending them as holy and necessary for salvation. I also did my utmost to observe and keep them personally as fully as possible, punishing my poor body with fasting, vigils, prayer, and other exercises — more than all those who now so bitterly hate and persecute me because I have taken away the glory of their self-justification. I was so diligent and scrupulous in observing all of this that I imposed on my body more than it could safely bear. I honored the pope purely out of conscience and with full sincerity, not seeking prebends, promotions, or incomes.

Whatever I did, I did with a simple heart, from genuine zeal, and for the glory of God. But those things that were once my gain I now count, with Paul, as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Our adversaries — who are idle souls, tried by no temptations — do not believe that I and many others have endured these things. I am speaking of those who with great longing sought peace and quiet of conscience, which in that darkness it was impossible for them to find.

Verses 15-17. But when He who had set me apart before I was born and called me by His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

This is Paul's first journey. He testifies here that immediately after being called by the grace of God to preach Christ among the Gentiles, he went into Arabia without consulting any man — going directly to the work to which he had been called. This passage witnesses by whom he was taught and by what means he came to the knowledge of the Gospel and to his apostleship. "When it pleased God," he says — as if to say: I did not deserve it. My zeal for the law of God was without wisdom, and in fact this foolish and wicked zeal — God permitting it — drove me headlong into increasingly abominable and terrible sins. I persecuted the church of God. I was an enemy of Christ. I blasphemed His Gospel. In short, I was responsible for the shedding of much innocent blood. That was what I had earned. In the middle of this terrible rage I was called to so great and immeasurable grace. Was it because of this outrageous cruelty? By no means. Rather, the abundant grace of God — who

calls and shows mercy to whomever He will — forgave and pardoned me all these blasphemies. And for these my terrible sins, which I then thought were perfect righteousness and an acceptable service to God, He gave me His grace, the knowledge of His truth, and called me to be an apostle.

We too have come to the knowledge of grace through the very same merits. In my monkish life I crucified Christ daily and blasphemed God through the false faith in which I continually lived. Outwardly I was not like other people — not a swindler, unjust, or sexually immoral. I kept chastity, poverty, and obedience. I was free from the concerns of ordinary life. I devoted myself entirely to fasting, vigils, prayer, the saying of Mass, and the like. Yet all the while I was fostering under this pretended holiness and trust in my own righteousness: continual mistrust, doubt, fear, hatred, and blasphemy against God. And my righteousness was nothing but a foul swamp and a pleasant kingdom of the devil. For Satan loves such saints and counts them as his dear darlings — those who destroy their own bodies and souls and cut themselves off from all the blessings of God's gifts. Meanwhile, wickedness, blindness, contempt of God, ignorance of the Gospel, profanation of the sacraments, blasphemy, trampling on Christ, and abuse of all God's gifts and benefits reign in them to the full. In short, such saints are the slaves of Satan, and are therefore driven to speak, think, and do whatever he wills — though outwardly they appear to surpass all others in good works, holiness, and strict living.

Such were we under the Papacy — truly no less contemptuous and blasphemous against Christ and His Gospel than Paul himself was, and I especially. For I so highly regarded the pope's authority that to disagree with him in even the smallest point seemed to me

a sin worthy of eternal death. That wicked opinion caused me to think that John Hus was a cursed heretic, and I considered it a serious offense even to think favorably of him. I would have personally supplied fire and sword to burn and destroy that heretic in defense of the pope's authority, and would have thought it the highest service to God to do so. Therefore, if you compare tax collectors and prostitutes with these holy hypocrites, they are not nearly so evil. For when such sinners offend, they have a troubled conscience and do not justify their wicked deeds. But these men are so far from acknowledging their abominations, idolatries, and corrupt invented ceremonies as sins, that they actually declare them to be righteousness and a most acceptable sacrifice to God. They venerate them as extraordinary acts of holiness, promise others salvation through them, and even sell them as things that contribute to salvation.

This then is our fine righteousness and lofty merit that brought us to the knowledge of grace — that we so dreadfully and so diabolically persecuted, blasphemed, trampled on, and condemned God, Christ, the Gospel, faith, the sacraments, all godly people, and the true worship of God, while teaching and establishing the very opposite of all these. And the more holy we were, the more blinded we were, and the more we worshiped the devil. There was not one of us who was not a bloodthirsty person — if not in deed, then in heart.

Verse 15. When it pleased God.

As if to say: It is the sole and immeasurable favor of God that He has not only spared me — so wicked and cursed a wretch, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a rebel against God — but has also given me the knowledge of salvation, His Spirit, Christ His Son,

the office of apostle, and everlasting life. So God, looking upon us as equally guilty in similar sins, has not only pardoned our wickedness and blasphemies out of pure mercy for Christ's sake, but has also overwhelmed us with great gifts and spiritual blessings. But many of us are not only ungrateful to God for this immeasurable grace — and as it is written in 2 Peter 1, have forgotten the cleansing of their former sins — but they have also opened a window to the devil again: they begin to despise His word, and many corrupt it, and so become the originators of new errors. The ends of such people are worse than their beginnings.

Verse 15. Who had set me apart before I was born.

This is a Hebrew expression. It means: who had set apart, ordained, and prepared me. That is, when I was still in my mother's womb, God had appointed that I would rage against His church in this way, and that afterward He would mercifully call me back from the midst of my cruelty and blasphemy by pure grace into the way of truth and salvation. In short, before I was born I was already an apostle in the sight of God — and when the time came, I was publicly revealed as an apostle before the whole world.

Thus Paul cuts off all personal merit and gives all glory to God, and to himself all shame and failure. As if to say: Every gift, great and small, spiritual and physical, that God purposed to give me — and every good thing I would ever do throughout my entire life — God had already appointed when I was still in my mother's womb, when I could not will, think, or do any good thing. Therefore this gift too came to me by pure predestination and free mercy before I was born. After I was born He sustained me, burdened as I was with countless monstrous evils and iniquities. And to declare more openly the unspeakable and immeasurable greatness of His mercy

toward me, He in pure mercy forgave me my great and countless sins, and moreover flooded me with such an abundance of His grace that not only would I myself know what things are given to us in Christ, but I would also preach these things to others. Such then were the merits of all people — and especially of those hardened old men who exercised themselves above all others in the foul swamp of human righteousness.

Verse 15. And called me by His grace.

Notice how carefully the apostle speaks. "He called me," he says. How? Was it for my Pharisaical religion? For my blameless and holy life? For my prayers, fastings, and works? No. Still less for my blasphemies, persecutions, and violences. How then? By His pure grace.

Verse 16. To reveal His Son to me.

Here you hear what kind of doctrine was given and entrusted to Paul: namely, the doctrine of the Gospel, which is the revelation of the Son of God. This is a doctrine entirely contrary to the law, which reveals not the Son of God but exposes sin, terrifies the conscience, reveals death, the wrath and judgment of God, and hell.

The Gospel then is a doctrine that admits no law alongside it. Whoever could rightly distinguish here would not look for the Gospel in the law, but would separate the Gospel from the law as widely as heaven is from earth. In itself this distinction is easy, sure, and plain — but for us it is hard and nearly impossible to grasp. It is easy enough to say that the Gospel is nothing other than the revelation of the Son of God, or the knowledge of Jesus Christ — and that it is not the revelation of the law. But to hold fast

to this in the actual agony and conflict of conscience and put it into practice — that is a hard thing, and hard even for the most experienced.

Now, if the Gospel is the revelation of the Son of God — as Paul defines it in this passage — then it surely does not accuse, does not frighten the conscience, does not threaten death, does not lead to despair, as the law does. It is a doctrine about Christ, which is neither law nor work, but our righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption. Though this is clearer than sunlight, yet the madness and blindness of the papists has been so great that they made the Gospel into a law of love, and Christ into a lawgiver who imposed stricter and heavier commandments than Moses himself. But the Gospel teaches that Christ did not come to set forth a new law and give commands about how to live. He came so that He might be offered up as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and so that our sins would be forgiven and everlasting life given to us for His sake — not for the works of the law or for our own righteousness. Of this immeasurable treasure freely given to us, the Gospel properly and specifically preaches. Therefore it is a kind of doctrine not learned or acquired by any human study, effort, or wisdom, nor yet by the law of God, but revealed by God Himself (as Paul says here) — first by the eternal word, and then by the inward working of God's Spirit. The Gospel is a divine word that came down from heaven and is revealed by the Holy Spirit, who was also sent for this purpose. Yet the outward word must come first. For Paul himself had no inward revelation until he had heard the outward word from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecut-

ing Me?" First, therefore, came the outward word — then followed revelations, the knowledge of the word, faith, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 16. That I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

It pleased God, he says, to reveal His Son to me. For what purpose? Not only so that I myself would believe in the Son of God, but also so that I would preach Him among the Gentiles. And why not among the Jews? Here we see clearly that Paul is properly the apostle to the Gentiles — even though he also preached Christ among the Jews.

Paul here sums up his whole theology in a few words — as is his custom — which is: to preach Christ among the Gentiles. As if to say: I will not burden the Gentiles with the law, because I am the apostle and evangelist of the Gentiles, not their lawgiver. Everything he says is thus directed against the false apostles. As if to say: O Galatians, you never heard me teaching the righteousness of the law or of works — that belongs to Moses, not to me Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. My office and ministry is to bring the Gospel to you and to show you the same revelation that I myself received. Therefore you should hear no teacher who teaches the law. For among the Gentiles it is not the law that is to be preached but the Gospel, not Moses but the Son of God, not the righteousness of works but the righteousness of faith. This is the preaching that properly belongs to the Gentiles.

Verse 16. I did not immediately consult with anyone.

When Paul mentions "flesh and blood" here, he is not referring to the apostles — because he immediately adds: "nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me." Paul's meaning

is that after he had received the revelation of the Gospel from Christ, he consulted no one in Damascus, and still less did he look to anyone to teach him the Gospel. Nor did he go to Jerusalem, to Peter and the other apostles, to learn the Gospel from them. Instead he straightaway preached Jesus Christ in Damascus, where he received baptism and the laying on of hands from Ananias — for it was necessary that he have an outward sign and testimony of his calling. Luke records the same thing in Acts 9.

Verse 17. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

That is: I went into Arabia before I had seen the apostles or consulted with them, and immediately I took up the work of preaching among the Gentiles, for that was what I had been called to do, and I had received a revelation from God for that purpose. He did not receive his Gospel from any person, nor from the apostles themselves — he was content with his heavenly calling and with the revelation of Jesus Christ alone. This entire passage is therefore a refutation of the false apostles' argument against Paul. They had said that he was merely a student and pupil of the apostles, who lived according to the law. Moreover, they said, Paul himself had also lived according to the law — and therefore the Gentiles must keep the law and be circumcised. In order to silence these critics, he recounts this detailed history. Before my conversion, he says, I did not learn my Gospel from the apostles or from any of the believing brothers — on the contrary, I was violently persecuting not only this doctrine but also the church of God and trying to destroy it. Nor did I learn it after my conversion — for I

preached immediately, not Moses with his law, but Jesus Christ, at Damascus, consulting no one and not yet having seen any of the apostles.

Verse 18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Paul acknowledges that he was with the apostles — but not with all of them. He makes clear, moreover, that he went up to Jerusalem on his own initiative, not under anyone's orders, and not to learn anything from them, but simply to visit Peter. Luke records the same in Acts 9: that Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles and told them how Paul had seen the Lord on the road and how He had spoken to him — and also how Paul had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. This is Barnabas's testimony on his behalf. Everything Paul says here is carefully arranged to prove that his Gospel was not from man. He does grant that he had seen Peter and James the Lord's brother — but none of the other apostles. And he learned nothing from the two he did see.

He grants that he was at Jerusalem with the apostles — and this is what the false apostles truly reported. He also grants that he had lived according to Jewish custom — but only when among Jews. This is what he says in 1 Corinthians 9: "Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews" — and he became all things to all people, that by all means he might save some. He concedes, then, that he was at Jerusalem with the apostles, but he denies that he learned his Gospel from them. He also denies that he was compelled to teach the Gospel according to

their prescription. The whole weight of this account rests on the word "to visit" — "I went," he says, "to visit Peter, not to learn from him." Therefore Peter is not my master, nor is James. And as for the other apostles, he flatly denies having seen any of them.

But why does Paul repeat so often that he did not learn his Gospel from men or from the apostles themselves? His purpose is to persuade the churches of Galatia, which had been led away by the false apostles, and to remove every doubt that his Gospel is the true word of God — which is why he repeats it so often. If he could not establish this, he could never silence the false apostles. For they would have objected: "We are as good as Paul. We are disciples of the apostles just as he is. Moreover, he is but one man alone and we are many — therefore we exceed him in both authority and number."

Here Paul was compelled to boast, affirm, and swear that he did not learn his Gospel from any human being, nor receive it from the apostles themselves. For his ministry was in great danger, as were all the churches for which he had served as their chief pastor and teacher. The necessity of his ministry and of all the churches required that with a necessary and holy boldness he declare his calling and the revelation of the Gospel made to him by Christ, so that their consciences might be thoroughly persuaded that his doctrine was the true word of God. Paul had a weighty task before him: to keep all the churches in Galatia in sound doctrine. In short, the matter at stake was eternal life and eternal death. For once the pure and certain word of God is taken away, there remains no further comfort, life, or salvation. The reason he recounts all of this, therefore, is to retain the churches in true doctrine — not to defend his own glory, as Porphyry and Julian falsely

slander him. His purpose is to show by this historical account that he received his Gospel from no man; and moreover that he preached for a period of three or four years the very same Gospel the apostles preached — by revelation from God — both in Damascus and Arabia, before he had ever seen any of the apostles.

Verse 20. And in what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!

Why does he add an oath? Because he is recounting a historical account and is compelled to swear, so that the churches may believe him and so that the false apostles cannot say: "Who knows whether Paul is telling the truth?" Here you see that Paul, God's chosen vessel, was held in such low esteem among his own Galatians — the very people to whom he had preached — that he was compelled to swear that he was telling the truth. If this happened to the apostles, that they had such powerful adversaries who dared despise them and accuse them of lying, what wonder is it if the same happens to us today — who are in no way worthy to be compared with the apostles? He swears, then, over what seems like a minor point — that he stayed with Peter only to visit him, not to learn from him. But if you weigh the matter carefully, it is of great importance, as everything said above makes clear. In the same way we, following Paul's example, swear: God knows that we do not lie.

Verse 21. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Syria and Cilicia are neighboring regions. Paul is still pressing the same point he has been making all along: both before he had seen the apostles and after, he was always a teacher of the Gospel. He received it by the revelation of Christ and was never a disciple of the apostles.

Verses 22-23. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

He adds this to complete the sequence of his historical account: after he had visited Peter, he went into Syria and Cilicia and preached there — and preached so effectively that he won the testimony of all the churches in Judea. As if to say: I appeal to the testimony of all the churches, even those in Judea. For the churches testify — not only in Damascus, Arabia, Syria, and Cilicia, but in Judea as well — that I have preached the very same faith that I once resisted and persecuted. And they glorify God because of me — not because I taught that circumcision and the law of Moses should be kept, but because of my preaching of faith and the building up of the churches through my ministry in the Gospel. Therefore you have the testimony not only of the people of Damascus and Arabia, but of the whole universal church in Judea.

The Second Chapter

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Verse 1. Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem.

Paul taught that the Gentiles were justified by faith alone without the works of the law. After publishing this doctrine among the Gentiles, he came to Antioch and reported to the disciples what he had done. Then those who had been trained in the old customs of the law rose against Paul with great indignation because he preached freedom from the bondage of the law to the Gentiles. A great controversy followed, which afterward stirred up further trouble. Paul and Barnabas stood firmly for the truth and testified: wherever we preached among the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit came and fell upon those who heard the word — and this happened throughout all the Gentile churches. We did not preach circumcision or require the keeping of the law — we preached only faith in Jesus Christ. And at this preaching of faith, God gave the Holy Spirit to the hearers. The Holy Spirit therefore approved the Gentiles' faith without the law and circumcision. For if the preaching of the Gospel and the faith of the Gentiles in Christ had not pleased Him, He would not have come down visibly upon uncircumcised people who heard the word. Since He did come down

upon them through the hearing of faith alone, it is certain that the Holy Spirit by this sign approved the faith of the Gentiles. For this was never seen to happen at the preaching of the law.

Then the Jews and many of the believing Pharisees — who still maintained great zeal for the law and strived earnestly to uphold its honor — fiercely opposed Paul (who maintained that the Gentiles were justified by faith alone without the works of the law), insisting that the law must be kept and that the Gentiles must be circumcised, for otherwise they could not be saved. This is no surprise — for the very name of the law of God is holy and awe-inspiring. Even a pagan who has never known anything of God's law, if he hears someone say "this teaching is the law of God," is moved by it. How much more then must the Jews have been moved and compelled to contend vigorously for God's law, having been nursed and trained in it from their infancy?

We see today how stubbornly the papists defend their traditions and doctrines of demons. It is therefore far less surprising that the Jews so vehemently and zealously fought for the law they had received from God. Custom has such power that where human nature is already inclined toward observing the law, long practice so reinforces that nature that it becomes a second nature. Therefore it was impossible for the Jews who had recently come to Christ to suddenly abandon the law. Even having received faith in Christ, they thought it still necessary to observe the law. God bore with this weakness for a time, until the doctrine of the Gospel could be clearly distinguished from the law. In the same way He bore with the weakness of Israel in the time of King Ahab, when the people wavered between two religions. And He bore with our weakness while we were under the blindness of the Papacy — for

He is patient and full of mercy. But we must not abuse the Lord's goodness and patience, or continue in our weakness and error, now that the truth has been revealed by the clear light of the Gospel.

Furthermore, those who stood against Paul — insisting that the Gentiles must be circumcised — had on their side first the law and the custom of the country, then the example of the apostles, and finally Paul's own example of having circumcised Timothy. So if Paul said in his defense that he did this not out of necessity but out of Christian love and freedom, to avoid giving offense to those who were weak in faith — who would believe him? The whole crowd would answer: It is plain that you circumcised Timothy. You may say what you like — but the fact is you did it. For this was a matter far beyond ordinary people's comprehension, and they could not understand the distinction Paul was drawing.

Moreover, no argument is effective when a man has lost the goodwill of the people and has fallen into bitter hatred and contempt. Paul therefore, seeing this controversy and these protests increase daily and having also been warned by a revelation from God, went up again to Jerusalem after fourteen years — in addition to those he had preached in Damascus and Arabia — to lay his Gospel before the other apostles. He did this not for his own sake, but for the people's sake.

Now this controversy about the observance of the law troubled Paul for a long time afterward and caused him much difficulty. I do not think, however, that this is the same controversy Luke describes in Acts 15, which appears to have occurred shortly after the

beginning of the Gospel. The account Paul gives here seems to belong to a much later time, when he had already preached the Gospel for about eighteen years.

Verse 1. Taking Barnabas along with me, and Titus also.

He associates two witnesses with himself: Barnabas and Titus. Barnabas was Paul's companion in preaching freedom from the servitude of the law to the Gentiles. He was also a witness of everything Paul had done and had seen the Holy Spirit given to the uncircumcised Gentiles who were free from Moses' law — through the preaching of faith in Jesus Christ alone. He stood firmly with Paul on this one point: it was not necessary to burden the Gentiles with the law — it was enough for them to believe in Christ. Therefore out of his own experience he testifies with Paul against the Jews that the Gentiles were made children of God and saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ, apart from the law or circumcision.

Titus was not only a Christian but also the chief overseer in Crete, for Paul had committed to him the charge of governing the churches there (Titus 1). And Titus was a Gentile.

Verse 2. I went up because of a revelation.

For had Paul not been prompted by a revelation, he would not have gone up to Jerusalem. But because God warned him by a specific revelation and commanded him to go, he went. He did this to restrain or at least to appease the believing Jews who were stubbornly insisting on the keeping of the law, so that the truth of the Gospel might be more fully promoted and confirmed.

Verse 2. And I set before them the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles.

After eighteen years of preaching, Paul went up to Jerusalem and conferred with the apostles — but not to learn anything from them.

Verse 2. Which I preach among the Gentiles.

Paul accommodated himself to the Jews on matters of the law — but he never compromised the true doctrine of the Gospel. His practice among them did not contradict what he preached. He could eat or not eat, circumcise or not circumcise, keep holy days or not keep them, and still remain consistent in doctrine. The false apostles distorted this and used it against him. But Paul had good reason for his conduct: he practiced the law outwardly among Jews to avoid unnecessarily offending them, while always holding firm to the truth that the law contributes nothing to justification.

Paul conferred with the apostles — but they taught him nothing. Rather, after he had laid out his Gospel before them, they agreed with him and added nothing to what he taught. They recognized the grace given to him and extended to him the right hand of fellowship. So the outcome of the conference was that Paul was not corrected or instructed by the apostles, but confirmed.

The central question of the council was this: Is it necessary to keep the law in order to be justified? The false apostles said yes. Paul said no — faith in Christ alone justifies, apart from the works of the law. This was the issue at stake, and on this point Paul prevailed.

Verse 2. But particularly with those who were the most eminent.

He conferred specifically with the chief apostles — Peter, James, and John. He did this not because he needed their approval, but so that their public agreement would silence the false apostles who claimed Paul's Gospel was defective.

Verse 2. Lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

Paul was not expressing doubt about his own calling or the truth of his Gospel. He never doubted that he had run well. His concern was for others — specifically those who might think he had labored in vain because the false apostles were undermining his ministry. He went to Jerusalem and conferred with the apostles so that the churches would see that all the apostles preached the same Gospel, and that the false apostles stood alone in their error.

Verse 3. But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

The word 'compelled' is key. It shows that circumcision was not required of Titus or of any Gentile. Had the apostles required it, Paul would have resisted. They did not — and this is Paul's point. The outcome of the Jerusalem conference was that Titus, a Gentile, was not compelled to be circumcised. This was a decisive victory for the truth of the Gospel.

Paul did not condemn circumcision as something evil or damnable in itself. His teaching was simply that circumcision is not necessary for righteousness. If a Jewish believer wanted to be circumcised out of respect for the law of Moses, Paul would not forbid it. But to require circumcision as necessary for salvation — that he rejected entirely. This distinction matters: circumcision is

neither a sin nor a means of justification; it is an outward sign that belongs to the old covenant and has no bearing on a person's standing before God.

The moderation the apostles reached was this: Jews who believed in Christ could continue to practice circumcision freely, according to their conscience. But Gentiles were not required to be circumcised. They were free from that obligation. This was not a contradiction — it was a wise accommodation to two different situations, while preserving the one essential truth: circumcision contributes nothing to justification.

Paul permitted circumcision where it was a matter of free conscience and love toward the weak. He circumcised Timothy, for example, to avoid giving unnecessary offense to Jews. But when the false apostles insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation, Paul resisted them to their face. The difference between the two cases is everything: free practice is one thing, compelled observance is another. Paul would yield in love but never yield in doctrine.

The false apostles made circumcision a requirement for salvation — and in doing so, they destroyed the Gospel. The same error reappears in every age. Today there are those who insist that their traditions and ceremonies must be observed for righteousness, just as the false apostles insisted on circumcision. Against all such teaching, we must press on boldly — as Paul did — refusing to let any human requirement be added to faith in Christ as a condition of salvation.

Paul's triumph at Jerusalem was this: Titus was not circumcised. The apostles agreed with Paul's Gospel and did not require circumcision of the Gentiles. This fact alone refutes the false apostles' claim that Paul's teaching was deficient and that circumcision was necessary. The most eminent apostles — Peter, James, and John — stood with Paul, not with his opponents.

Paul did not condemn circumcision. In his view, circumcision is like eating or drinking — neither a sin nor a righteousness. It is an outward, physical act that has no effect on a person's standing before God. The soul is not made holy or unclean by such things. What matters before God is faith working through love — not whether a person has undergone a physical rite. To treat an outward ceremony as necessary for salvation is to misunderstand the entire Gospel.

Verse 4. But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

Paul now explains his full reason for going to Jerusalem and for refusing to circumcise Titus. He went not for his own sake but for the sake of the churches, so that the truth of the Gospel would be publicly confirmed by the apostles. He refused to circumcise Titus because false brethren had infiltrated the gathering — people who pretended to be believers but were actually spying on the freedom that Christians have in Christ. Their goal was to bring believers back under the bondage of the law. Against this threat, Paul stood firm: he would not yield for even a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel would be preserved for the churches.

When Paul speaks of 'the truth of the Gospel,' he implies there is also a false gospel. The Gospel itself is simple, true, and sincere — but through the work of Satan's ministers it can be distorted and corrupted. The false apostles also preached faith and a gospel, but both were false. Paul stood firm against them, refusing to give ground, so that the truth of the Gospel would continue among the Galatians. Today the papists and Anabaptists boast in the same way that they preach the Gospel and faith in Christ. They do — but with the same result as the false apostles, whom Paul calls in chapter one 'troublers of the church' and 'perverters of the Gospel of Christ.' All heretics claim the name of God, of Christ, and of the church. They insist they teach not error and lies but certain truth and the pure Gospel of Christ.

The truth of the Gospel is this: our righteousness comes by faith alone, apart from the works of the law. The corruption of the Gospel is the claim that we are justified by faith, but not without the works of the law. This is exactly how the false apostles preached. Our modern opponents do the same. They say we must believe in Christ and that faith is the foundation of salvation — but then add that faith does not justify unless it is completed by love. That is not the truth of the Gospel; it is falsehood. The true Gospel teaches that works and love are not the finishing touch that perfects faith. Faith itself is God's gift and God's work in the heart — and it justifies precisely because it lays hold of Christ our Redeemer. Human reason focuses on the law and asks: 'What have I done? What have I left undone?' But faith, operating in its proper role, has only one object: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, given up to death for the sins of the whole world. Faith does not look to love. It does not ask: 'What have I done? What have I deserved?' It asks:

'What has Christ done? What has He deserved?' And the truth of the Gospel answers: He has redeemed you from your sin, from the devil, and from eternal death. Faith therefore recognizes that in this one person, Jesus Christ, it has forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Anyone who turns his eyes from this object does not have true faith but a fantasy and an empty opinion — and turns from the promise to the law, which only terrifies and drives to despair.

What the Scholastic theologians taught about justifying faith being perfected by love is nothing but empty theorizing. The faith that lays hold of Christ the Son of God — furnished with Him — is the faith that justifies, not a faith that includes love as its completion. True, steadfast faith must hold to nothing else but Christ alone. In the afflictions and terrors of conscience, it has nothing else to lean on but this precious gem: Christ Jesus. Therefore, the person who lays hold of Christ by faith — however much he may be terrified by the law and weighed down by his sins — can boldly declare that he is righteous. How? By what means? Through that precious treasure, Christ, which he possesses by faith. Our opponents do not understand this. They set aside Christ as their precious gem and put love in His place. Since they do not know what faith is, they cannot have faith — and they certainly cannot teach it to others. What they claim to have is nothing more than a dream, an opinion, and natural reason — not faith.

I say all this so you can see that when Paul mentions 'the truth of the Gospel,' he speaks with great intensity of spirit, intending to rebuke its opposite. He rebukes the false apostles for teaching a false gospel — they required circumcision and observance of the law as necessary for salvation. They also tried to trap Paul by watching him closely: would he circumcise Titus? Would he dare

oppose them in front of the apostles? For this reason he rebukes them sharply. They were spying out the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, he says, so they could bring us into bondage. The false apostles came armed on every side, hoping to defeat and humiliate him before the whole assembly. They used the authority of the apostles against him, accusing him: 'Paul has brought Titus — an uncircumcised man — into the company of all the faithful. He denies and condemns the law right here in your presence, you who are apostles. If he dares do this here and before you, what will he do in your absence among the Gentiles?'

Seeing that he was being craftily attacked from all sides, Paul stood firm against the false apostles. He would not let their efforts endanger the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, though the false brothers sought by every means to entangle him and cause him great trouble. In the end he prevailed — even by the judgment of the apostles themselves — and refused to yield, not even for an hour. The false apostles' real goal was to make Paul abandon this freedom, at least for a time. But Paul saw that they were demanding observance of the law as necessary for salvation. If they had only appealed to charitable consideration for the weak brothers, Paul would have given way. But that was not what they were after. They wanted to bring Paul and all who held his doctrine into bondage. Therefore he would not yield to them — not even for a single moment.

We offer the papists everything that can reasonably be offered — indeed, more than we should. The one thing we will not surrender is the freedom of conscience we have in Christ Jesus. We will not allow our consciences to be bound to any work, so that doing or not doing something determines whether we are righteous or

condemned. We are willing to eat what they eat, to observe their feast days and fast days — so long as they allow us to do so with a free conscience, and stop using the threatening words with which they have terrorized and subjugated the world: 'We command, we charge, we charge again, we excommunicate.' But this freedom we cannot obtain from them — just as Paul could not obtain it in his own time. So we do as he did: when he saw he could not secure this freedom, he refused to yield to the false apostles even for an hour.

Our opponents will not concede that faith alone in Christ justifies. Therefore, we in turn will not and cannot concede to them that faith perfected by love justifies. On this point we must and should be immovable and unyielding — otherwise we would lose the truth of the Gospel. We would lose the freedom we have, not in the Emperor, not in kings and princes, not in the pope, not in the world or in human reason — but in Christ Jesus. We would lose faith in Christ, which lays hold of nothing else but that precious treasure, Christ Himself. If our opponents will leave this faith sound and uncorrupted — the faith by which we are regenerate, justified, and united to Christ — we offer to accommodate them in all things that do not conflict with this faith. But since they will not grant us this, we for our part will not yield to them by a single hair's breadth. The matter at stake is too great: it is the death of the Son of God, who by the Father's will and command was made flesh, was crucified, and died for the sins of the world. If faith yields here, then Christ's death and resurrection accomplish nothing. Then it is a fable that Christ is the Savior of the world. Then God Himself is found a liar, because He has not fulfilled what He promised. Our boldness in this matter is therefore godly and holy

— by it we seek to preserve the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and thereby to retain the truth of the Gospel. If we lose that, we lose God, Christ, all the promises, faith, righteousness, and eternal life.

Someone might object: 'The law is divine and holy.' Let the law have its glory — but no law, however divine and holy, should teach me that I am justified and will live through it. The law teaches me that I ought to love God and my neighbor, that I ought to live in chastity, sobriety, and patience — I grant all of this. But the law cannot show me how to be delivered from sin, the devil, death, and hell. For that I must turn to the Gospel. I must listen to the Gospel, which does not tell me what I ought to do — that is the law's proper office — but what Jesus Christ the Son of God has done for me: He suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The Gospel calls me to receive and believe this. That is the truth of the Gospel. It is also the chief article of all Christian teaching — the one in which the knowledge of all true godliness is found. It is therefore absolutely necessary that we know this article well, teach it to others, and impress it upon them continually. It is a tender truth and easily damaged. Paul knew this from hard experience — and all godly people know it as well.

To sum up: Paul refused to circumcise Titus, and for no other reason than that certain false brothers had crept in to spy on their freedom and wanted to compel Paul to circumcise him. Seeing this compulsion and pressure, Paul gave way to no one — not even for an hour — but stood firm against them. That is why he says: 'Not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.' If they had asked this as a matter of brotherly love, Paul would not have refused. But they demanded it

as a requirement, by compulsion, to the bad example of others, to the ruin of the Gospel, and to bring people's consciences into bondage. Therefore Paul resisted them powerfully — and prevailed, so that Titus was not circumcised.

It might seem like a minor thing whether or not someone is circumcised. But when a person trusts that keeping it makes them righteous, or fears that not keeping it brings condemnation, then God is denied, Christ is rejected, and the grace and promises of God are thrown away. If circumcision is practiced without that false trust attached to it, there is no danger in it. If the pope required us to keep his traditions merely as outward ceremonies, it would not be burdensome to observe them — we use ceremonies too. But to bind people's consciences to these ceremonies, to make them into a high and acceptable service to God, and then to add that eternal life or eternal damnation depends on observing them — that is devilish superstition and rank blasphemy. Whoever will not speak against this — let them be accursed.

Verses 6-7. And from those who were reputed to be important — what they were previously makes no difference to me.

This is a bold and forceful refutation. Paul gives the true apostles no special title — instead he speaks of them in a way that almost downplays their status: 'those who seemed to be important,' that is, those who held authority and on whose judgment all matters depended. Yet the apostles did in fact hold great authority in all the churches, and Paul was not trying to diminish it. He was answering the false apostles, who were wielding the apostles' names and reputations against Paul in all the churches in order to undermine his authority and bring his entire ministry into contempt. Paul could not allow this. To preserve the truth of the Gospel and

the freedom of conscience in Christ among the Galatians and all the Gentile churches, he boldly answered the false apostles: it made no difference to him how great the apostles were or what they had been in the past. When his opponents used the authority of the apostles' names against him, it made no impression on him. He acknowledged that the apostles are indeed significant people and that their authority deserves respect. But no name or title — whether apostle or angel from heaven — should be allowed to overthrow his Gospel and ministry.

This was one of the false apostles' strongest arguments against Paul. They said: the apostles lived closely with Christ for three years. They heard and saw all His preaching and miracles. They even preached and worked miracles while Christ was still living in the world. Paul, on the other hand, never saw Christ in the flesh, and his conversion came long after Christ's glorification. So who should be believed — Paul, who stood alone and was the last of all to become an apostle, or the chief and most eminent apostles, sent and confirmed by Christ Himself long before Paul? Paul's answer: What of all this? This argument proves nothing. Let the apostles be as great as they are — let them even be angels from heaven. That is beside the point. The question here is not about the apostles' greatness but about the word of God and the truth of the Gospel. Everything depends on this: that the Gospel be preserved pure and uncorrupted — and that must be placed above all else. So however great Peter and the other apostles were, however many miracles they worked — that is beside the point. The one thing I am after is this: that the truth of the Gospel continue among you. This may seem like a thin answer — that Paul deliberately dismisses the

apostles' authority and meets his opponents' powerful argument with nothing more than 'it makes no difference to me.' But he does add a reason for his refutation.

Verse 6. God shows no partiality.

Paul draws this from Moses, who uses it repeatedly: 'You shall not show partiality to the rich or the poor in judgment.' And this is a foundational principle of theology: God shows no partiality. With this he shuts the mouths of the false apostles. As if to say: You set against me those who seem to be important — but God cares nothing for such outward things. He does not regard the office of apostleship. He does not look at human dignity or authority. As proof: He allowed Judas, one of the foremost apostles, and Saul, the greatest and first of all Israel's kings, to fall away and be condemned. He rejected both Ishmael and Esau, even though they were firstborn sons. Throughout all of Scripture you will find that God repeatedly rejected those who by outward appearance seemed to be very good and holy men. In these examples God can seem harsh — but such sobering examples were necessary, and necessary that they be recorded. For this tendency is naturally rooted in us: we place great weight on the outward appearance and status of people, often valuing it more than the word of God. God, on the other hand, wants us to fix our eyes entirely on the word itself. He does not want us to revere and honor the apostleship in the persons of Peter and Paul, but Christ speaking through them, and the word they bring and preach to us.

The natural person cannot see this distinction — only the spiritual person can separate the person from the word, the veil of God from God Himself. Every creature is a veil of God. In this life God does not deal with us face to face but from behind a covering — as

Paul says in another place: 'we see now as in a mirror dimly' (1 Corinthians 13:12). We cannot do without these veils in this life. But wisdom is needed here — wisdom that can distinguish the veil from God Himself — and the world does not have this wisdom. The greedy person hears that 'man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4), and he eats the bread but does not see God in it. He looks only at the veil and the outward form. He does the same with gold and other possessions, trusting in them as long as he has them — but when they are gone, he despairs. In this way he honors not the Creator but the creature, not God but his own appetite.

I say this so no one will think Paul is condemning all outward distinctions or persons. He does not say there should be no persons at all — only that God shows no partiality. Persons and outward distinctions must exist; God has given them and they are His good creatures. But we must not put our trust in them. What matters is the right use of things, not the things themselves — as I have said before. There is no fault in circumcision or uncircumcision — for circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing — but in how they are used. To attach righteousness to one and unrighteousness to the other — that use is damnable and must be rejected. Once that false use is removed, circumcision and uncircumcision are both acceptable.

The prince, the magistrate, the preacher, the schoolmaster, the student, the father, the mother, the children, the master, and the servant — all of these are persons and outward distinctions that God wants us to acknowledge, love, and respect as His creatures. These roles are necessary in this life. But He does not want us to revere or trust in them so much that we forget Him. To keep us

from placing too much weight on outward persons or trusting in them, God allows them to commit offenses and sins — even great and shameful sins — to teach us the difference between the person and God Himself. David, the good king, fell into horrible sins — adultery and murder — so that no one would place their trust in him. Peter, the excellent apostle, denied Christ. Examples like these fill the Scripture, and they are warnings: do not rest your trust in the person and outward role, or think that having the outward show means you have everything. This is the error of Popery — it judges everything by outward appearance, and therefore all of it amounts to nothing more than partiality and show. God has given His creatures for our use and service, not as idols for us to serve. So let us use bread, wine, clothing, possessions, gold, and silver and all other created things — but let us not trust or glory in them. We must trust and glory in God alone. He alone is to be loved, feared, and honored.

By 'person' here, Paul means the apostleship — the apostles' office: their many great miracles, their teaching, their conversions, their personal closeness to Christ. In short, the word 'person' includes the apostles' entire outward life, which was holy, and their authority, which was great. Yet God, he says, does not esteem these things — not that He disregards them entirely, but in the matter of justification He does not consider them, however great and glorious they may be. We must carefully maintain this distinction: in matters of theology, we must speak very differently from how we speak in matters of civil life. In civil life God wants us to honor and respect these outward roles and persons as His instruments by which He governs and preserves the world. But when the question concerns religion, conscience, the fear of God, faith, and the wor-

ship of God, we must not fear these outward persons, place no trust in them, look for no comfort from them, and hope for no deliverance — physical or spiritual — from them. For this reason God will have no partiality in judgment, because judgment is a divine matter. Therefore I should neither fear the judge nor trust in the judge — my fear and trust must be in God alone, who is the true judge. I ought to respect the civil judge and magistrate for God's sake, since he serves as God's minister. But my conscience must not rest on his justice and fairness, nor be driven by his injustice or tyranny to commit any offense against God — lying, bearing false witness, or denying the truth. Apart from that, I will honor and respect the magistrate with all my heart.

I would honor the pope and love his person too, if he would leave my conscience free and not compel me to sin against God. But he demands to be feared and worshiped in a way that cannot be done without offending the majesty of God. Since we must lose one, let us lose the person and hold fast to God. We could have accepted the pope's authority — but because he has abused it so tyrannically against us, seeking to compel us to deny and blaspheme God and to acknowledge him alone as our lord and master, burdening our consciences and robbing us of the fear and trust we owe to God alone — we are compelled by God's command to resist the pope. As it is written: 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). Therefore we reject the authority of the pope — and we do so without any guilty conscience, which is our singular comfort.

The word 'God' carries weight here: in matters of religion and the word of God, there must be no partiality. But in matters of civil life, we must give proper regard to persons — otherwise all respect and order would collapse. In this world, God has established order,

respect, and distinctions between persons. Without them, children, students, servants, and subjects would say: 'I am as much a Christian as my father, my teacher, my master, my prince — so why should I show them respect?' Before God there is no partiality — neither Greek nor Jew, for all are one in Christ. But before the world, these distinctions remain.

So Paul dissolves the false apostles' argument about apostolic authority by showing it is irrelevant to the question at hand. The issue is not about human persons and their status — it is a far weightier matter: a divine matter concerning God and His word, and whether that word must be preferred above the apostleship. Paul's answer: so that the truth of the Gospel may stand, so that the word of God and the righteousness of faith may be kept pure and uncorrupted, let the apostleship fall — let an angel from heaven, let Peter, let Paul, let all of them perish.

Verse 6. But those who were highly regarded contributed nothing to me.

As if to say: My conference with the apostles was not a session where they taught me anything. What could they teach me, when Christ had already taught me everything fully through His revelation? And beyond that, I had now been preaching the Gospel for eighteen years among the Gentiles, and Christ had confirmed my doctrine through many miracles. So it was a consultation, not a debate. I learned nothing in it, neither did I recant anything nor defend my case — I simply reported what I had done: I had preached faith in Christ alone to the Gentiles, without the law, and through this preaching of faith the Holy Spirit had come down upon the Gentiles, and they had immediately spoken in various tongues.

When the apostles heard this, they testified that I had taught the truth. Therefore the false apostles do me great wrong by twisting and reversing all of this.

If Paul would not yield to false apostles who used the authority of the true apostles against him, we have even less reason to yield to our opponents, who have nothing to boast of except the authority of their idol, the pope. I know that godly people should be humble — but against the pope I will and must be proud with a holy pride, and say: You, Pope, I will not submit to you. I will not accept you as my master, because I am certain that my doctrine is true and godly. But the pope will not hear this. He would force us to obey his laws and decrees, and if we refuse, he immediately excommunicates, curses, and condemns us as heretics. Such boldness against the pope is therefore absolutely necessary. If we were not so bold — if we did not utterly reject in the Holy Spirit both him and all his doctrine, and the devil, the father of lies, who speaks through him — we would never be able to defend the article of justification by faith. We do not reject the pope's authority because we want to rule over him, nor do we try to exalt ourselves above all governing authority — for it is plain that we teach everyone to humble themselves and submit to the governing authorities God has ordained. The one thing we seek is this: that the glory of God be upheld and the righteousness of faith be kept pure and sound.

If the pope will grant us this — that God alone by His pure grace through Christ justifies sinners — we will not only carry him on our shoulders but even kiss his feet. But since we cannot obtain this from him, we stand against him before God with absolute boldness and will not yield one hair's breadth — not to all the an-

gels in heaven, not to Peter, not to Paul, not to a hundred emperors, not to a thousand popes, not to the whole world. Far be it from us to humble ourselves here, when they would strip from us our greatest treasure — God Himself who created us and gave us all things, and Jesus Christ who redeemed us with His blood. Let this then be our final conclusion: we will surrender our possessions, our reputation, our lives, and everything we have — but the Gospel, our faith, Jesus Christ — these we will never allow to be torn from us. Cursed be that humility which bows and gives way here. Let every Christian stand firm and unyielding — unless he is willing to deny Christ.

Therefore, God helping me, my resolve will be harder than iron. Here I take up this motto, according to the proverb: I give way to no one. I am glad with my whole heart to be called rebellious and stubborn on this point. I confess it openly: on this matter I am and always will be firm and unmovable, and will not yield one inch to any creature. Love gives way — for love endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and bears all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). But faith gives way to nothing. As the old saying goes: a man's good name, his faith, and his eyes are not things to be trifled with. Therefore in matters of faith, a Christian can never be too firm or too bold — he must not soften or give ground, not even by a hair's breadth. Faith makes a person in some measure like God, and God endures nothing and yields to no one — He is unchangeable. So faith is unchangeable too, and therefore yields to nothing and no one. But in matters of love, a Christian should yield and endure all things — because in that sphere he is only a man.

Verses 7-8. But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for He who was at work for Peter as an apostle to the circumcised was also at work for me as an apostle to the Gentiles).

With these words Paul powerfully refutes the false apostles. He claims for himself the same authority that the false apostles attributed only to the true apostles. He uses a rhetorical reversal here, turning their own argument back against them. The false apostles, he says, use the authority of the great apostles against me to strengthen their case. I in turn use that same authority against them for my defense — because the apostles are on my side. Therefore, O Galatians, do not believe these counterfeit apostles who boast so loudly of apostolic authority against me. For when the apostles saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised, and recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, approving my ministry and giving thanks to God for the gift I had received. So he turns the false apostles' own argument against them. In these words there is an intense force that carries more meaning than can be fully expressed in speech.

This passage may seem difficult, where Paul says the Gospel to the uncircumcised was committed to him and the Gospel to the circumcised to Peter — since in fact Paul preached to Jews in their synagogues almost everywhere, and Peter likewise preached to Gentiles. Both the Acts of the Apostles and other sources confirm this. Peter converted the centurion Cornelius and his household, who were Gentiles. He also wrote to Gentiles, as his first letter shows. Paul, while preaching Christ among the Gentiles, regularly

entered Jewish synagogues and preached the Gospel there. And Christ Himself commands in Matthew and Mark that His apostles go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Paul likewise says the Gospel was preached to every creature under heaven. So why does Paul call himself the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter and the others apostles to the circumcised?

This question is not difficult. Paul is simply noting that the other apostles remained primarily in Jerusalem until God called them to other places. While the Jewish nation continued to exist, the apostles stayed in Judea; but as the destruction of Jerusalem approached, they dispersed throughout the world. Paul, as Acts records, was specifically called to be the apostle to the Gentiles and was sent out from Judea to travel through Gentile lands. Since Jews were scattered throughout the world and lived among Gentiles in cities everywhere, Paul would regularly enter their synagogues when he arrived — preaching to them first as children of the kingdom, announcing that the promises made to the fathers had now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When they refused to listen, he turned to the Gentiles. As Luke records, Paul boldly told the Jews: 'It was necessary that we speak God's word to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles' (Acts 13:46). And again in Acts: 'Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen' (Acts 28:28). Paul was therefore sent specifically to the Gentiles. But because he was a debtor to all and became all things to all people, he took every opportunity to enter synagogues as well, where not only Jews but also Gentiles would hear him preach Christ. At times he preached publicly in the marketplace, in houses, and by river-

banks. His primary calling was as apostle to the Gentiles, as Peter's was to the Jews — though Peter also preached Christ to the Gentiles when the occasion arose.

Paul uses the terms 'uncircumcision' and 'circumcision' as figures of speech — a part standing for the whole — which is common in Scripture. The Gospel to the uncircumcised means the Gospel that was to be preached to the Gentiles. This Gospel, he says, was committed to him, just as the Gospel to the circumcised was committed to Peter. As Peter preached the Gospel among the Jews, so Paul preached it among the Gentiles.

Paul repeats this point often: Peter, James, and John — those regarded as pillars of the church — taught him nothing and did not commission him to preach the Gospel as if they held authority over him. Rather, they themselves saw that the Gospel had been committed to him — but not by Peter. Just as he had not received or learned his Gospel from any human being, so he received his commission to preach it from no human authority. Both the knowledge of the Gospel and the command to preach it among the Gentiles came directly from God — just as the charge to preach it among the Jews came directly from God to Peter.

This passage shows plainly that all the apostles shared the same calling, the same charge, and the same Gospel. Peter preached no different Gospel from the rest, nor did he assign to others their specific offices. There was equality among them all — they were all taught of God, and their calling and charge came entirely and directly from God. No one among them was greater than another; no one had any advantage over another. Therefore, when

the pope boasts that Peter was the chief of the apostles — using that claim to prop up his own usurped authority — it is a shameless lie.

Verse 8. For He who was at work for Peter.

This is Paul's refutation of another argument from the false apostles. Why do they boast, he says, that Peter's Gospel was powerful — that he converted many, worked great miracles, raised the dead, and healed the sick by his very shadow? All of that is true, Paul grants. But Peter received that power from heaven. God gave such force to his word that many believed, and great miracles were worked through him. I had the same power — not received from Peter, but from the same God and the same Spirit who worked powerfully through Peter. I received the same grace, taught many, worked many miracles, and healed the sick through me as well. Luke testifies to this in Acts 19: 'God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out' (Acts 19:11-12). See also Acts 13, 16, 20, and 28.

In short, Paul refuses to be considered inferior to the other apostles in any respect — and in this he stands with a godly and holy boldness. He was compelled by necessity to stand firm against Peter, and his zeal for God forced him to be unyielding whether he wanted to be or not. Certain unbelievers, like Julian and Porphyry, misread this and thought Paul's boldness was nothing but personal pride — the kind we see today in the pope and his followers. But Paul was not fighting for his own interests here. He was fighting for the matter of faith. In matters of faith we must be immovable — harder, if possible, than diamond. In matters of love we must be

soft and flexible — more yielding than a reed or leaf trembling in the wind. The controversy here was not about Paul's own glory, but about God's glory, the word of God, true worship, true religion, and the righteousness of faith — so that these things might remain pure and uncorrupted.

Verse 9. Recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

That is: when they heard that I had received my calling and commission directly from God to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles, and that God had worked so many miracles through me, and that through my ministry so many Gentiles had come to the knowledge of Christ, and that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit through the preaching of faith alone — without the law or circumcision — they glorified God for the grace that had been given to me.

By 'grace' Paul means everything he had received from God — that from being a persecutor and destroyer of the church he had been made an apostle, taught by Jesus Christ, and enriched with spiritual gifts. He shows that Peter bore witness to him that he was a true apostle, sent and taught not by any human being or by the other apostles, but by God alone. Peter acknowledged Paul's ministry and authority, and the spiritual gifts at work in him, as gifts from heaven. He approved and confirmed them — not as a superior giving orders, but as a brother bearing witness. James and John did the same. Paul therefore concludes that those who were regarded as the foremost pillars among the apostles stood entirely with him, not against him.

Verse 9. They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.

The right hand of fellowship meant, in effect: 'O Paul, in preaching the Gospel we are in agreement with you in all things.' 'In doctrine we are partners — we share the same fellowship: we have one doctrine, for we preach one Gospel, one baptism, one Christ, and one faith.' 'We have nothing to teach you or require of you, since we are in full agreement on everything.' 'We teach nothing different or superior to what you teach — the same gifts we have, we see in you as well — except that you have been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised as we have been entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised.' 'But we agree on this: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision should stand in the way of our partnership, since we both preach the one Gospel.'

Up to this point Paul has established by clear testimony — not only from God but also from human witnesses, namely the apostles — that he had preached the Gospel faithfully and truly. Therefore everything the false apostles said to undermine his authority was invented and fabricated. The testimony of the apostles is on his side, not on theirs. But because he stands alone without corroborating witnesses in what follows, he adds an oath and calls God as his witness that what he has said is true.

Verse 10. They asked only that we remember the poor — the very thing I was also eager to do.

After the preaching of the Gospel, the duty of a true and faithful pastor is to care for the poor. Wherever the church exists, there will be poor people — who for the most part are the only true disciples of the Gospel, as Christ says: 'The poor have the Gospel

preached to them' (Matthew 11:5). The world and the devil persecute the church and drive many into poverty, and these are then abandoned and despised by the world. Beyond this, the world not only fails in caring for the poor, but is also indifferent to supporting the Gospel, true religion, and the true worship of God. No one wants to take on the cost of providing for the ministers of the church and establishing schools — yet for building up false worship, superstition, and idolatry, no expense was spared and everyone gave generously. This is how so many monasteries, cathedral churches, and bishoprics arose in the papal church — all overflowing with impiety and lavishly funded — while today an entire city begrudges the support of one or two poor ministers and preachers of the Gospel. This same city once bore the burden of supporting entire monasteries and endless swarms of Mass priests. True religion is always in need. Christ Himself says He is hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, and sick. False religion and impiety, by contrast, flourish and overflow with worldly wealth and prosperity. Therefore a true and faithful pastor must also have a care for the poor — and Paul here acknowledges that he did.

Verse 11. But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Paul continues his defense, pointing out that he not only has the testimony of Peter and the other apostles at Jerusalem in his favor — he also publicly opposed Peter in front of the whole church at Antioch. He is dealing here with something that happened openly, before the entire church — not in a private corner. As I have said, the matter at stake is not trivial: it is the chief article of all Christian teaching. Anyone who rightly grasps its importance will count everything else as secondary. What is Peter? What is

Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all other creatures compared to the article of justification? If we understand this article, we walk in clear light. If we are ignorant of it, we are in the deepest darkness. Therefore, if you see this article attacked or corrupted, do not hesitate to resist — even Peter himself, even an angel from heaven — following Paul's example. When he saw that Peter's status was putting this great article at risk, he set aside all regard for Peter's dignity and reputation in order to keep the truth pure and uncorrupted. For it is written: 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me' (Matthew 10:37).

We are not ashamed, therefore, to be called proud and stubborn by hypocrites — those who say we will only listen to ourselves and yield to no one. In defense of the truth, it is absolutely necessary to be unyielding. The reason we offend people — that is, set aside the dignity of persons and the world's opinion — is that what the world judges as the most serious sins are in God's sight outstanding virtues. We do right to love our parents, honor the magistrate, and show respect to Peter and other ministers of the word. But here the cause we are defending belongs not to Peter, not to parents, not to the magistrate, not to the world, not to any creature — but to God Himself. When the cause is God's, I do right to yield to no one — not to my parents, not to the magistrate, not to an angel from heaven. What is any creature compared to the Creator? What are all creatures together before Him? Like a single drop of water compared to the whole ocean. Why should I so highly esteem Peter — who is but a drop — and set aside God — who is the whole ocean? Let the drop give way to the ocean. Let Peter give

way to God. I say this so that you may carefully weigh and consider what Paul is really dealing with here — for he is dealing with God, who can never be honored enough.

He deliberately adds the phrase 'to his face' — a rebuke to the venomous false apostles who slander people in their absence but dare not open their mouths in their presence. The false apostles did exactly this: they did not dare speak against Paul to his face, but behind his back they slandered him without restraint. I did not do that with Peter, Paul says. I opposed him openly and directly — not out of pretense, ambition, or any personal motive, but because he was to be blamed.

Let others debate whether an apostle can sin. What I say is this: we must not minimize Peter's fault. Even the prophets have sometimes erred. Nathan, speaking on his own authority, told David to build the house of the Lord — but this was immediately corrected by a revelation from God, who said that not David, being a man of war who had shed much blood, but his son Solomon would build the house. The apostles erred too — they imagined that Christ's kingdom would be an earthly, political one, as we see in Acts 1. Peter himself, though he had received Christ's command to go into all the world, would not have gone to Cornelius had he not been prompted by a vision. But here Peter did more than simply err — he committed a serious sin. If Paul had not confronted him, all the believing Gentiles would have been forced to receive circumcision and keep the law. The believing Jews would have been confirmed in their view that keeping these things was necessary for salvation. The result would have been that the law replaced the Gospel and Moses replaced Christ. Peter's hypocrisy

alone would have caused this enormous disaster and terrible sin. We must therefore not attribute to the saints such perfection that they cannot sin.

Luke records that the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas — both of whom had been set apart for the ministry of the Gospel among the Gentiles and had traveled together through many regions — became so great that they parted from each other. We must acknowledge that there was a fault in one or both of them. And clearly the discord that separated two companions joined together in such a holy ministry was exceptionally serious, as the text shows. Such examples are recorded for our comfort. It is a great comfort to know that even saints who have the Spirit of God still sin. Those who claim the saints do not sin would strip us of that comfort.

Samson, David, and many other outstanding men full of the Holy Spirit fell into serious sins. Job and Jeremiah cursed the day of their birth. Elijah and Jonah grew weary of life and asked for death. Scripture sets forth these failures and sins of the saints as comfort for those weighed down by despair, and as a warning to the proud. No one has ever fallen so far that they cannot rise again. And no one stands so securely that they cannot fall. If Peter fell, so may I. If he rose again, so may I. People with tender, troubled consciences should take great encouragement from examples like these, so they can better understand what they are asking for when they pray: 'Forgive us our trespasses' — and when they confess: 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins.' We have the same Spirit of grace and prayer that the apostles and all the saints had. They had no advantage over us. We share the same gifts, the same Christ, the

same baptism, the same word, the same forgiveness of sins — all of which they needed no less than we do, and by which they were sanctified and saved, just as we are.

Verse 12. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

The Gentiles who had come to faith ate foods the law had forbidden, and Peter — living among these converted Gentiles — ate and drank with them, including wine that the law prohibited. He knew this was right, and so he freely broke the law's dietary regulations along with the Gentiles. Paul says the same of himself: he became as a Jew with Jews, and as one without the law with those outside the law — meaning that among Gentiles he ate and drank like a Gentile, without observing the law, while among Jews he abstained from what the law forbade. He did this to serve and win as many as possible. So Peter did not sin by eating and drinking with the Gentiles — he did well, and he knew it was lawful. By breaking the law's dietary rules, he demonstrated that the law was not necessary for righteousness, and freed the Gentiles from feeling obligated to observe it. If it was lawful for Peter to break the law in one thing, it was lawful in all things. Paul's rebuke of Peter, then, is not about his eating — it is about his hypocrisy, as the next verse shows.

Verse 12. But when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

Here is Peter's sin, as Paul sets it out plainly. Paul does not charge him with malice or ignorance, but with hypocrisy and weakness. Peter stopped eating the foods the law had forbidden, fearing that the Jews who had come from James would be of-

fended, and he showed more concern for the Jews than for the Gentiles. By doing so he gave as much cause as he could to overthrow Christian freedom and the truth of the Gospel. When he withdrew and completely separated himself — avoiding foods he had eaten before — he put a stumbling block in the conscience of the faithful. They would reason from his example: Peter abstains from foods forbidden by the law; therefore, whoever eats such foods sins and violates the law — but whoever abstains is righteous and keeps the law, for otherwise Peter would not have withdrawn. By deliberately refusing what he had previously eaten, Peter was implying that those who ate such foods sinned, while those who abstained were righteous and justified.

Note that what Paul rebukes here is not the act itself but the message it sent. In itself, eating or not eating is nothing. But the implied conclusion — that eating is sinful and abstaining is righteousness — is evil. Circumcision likewise is not evil in itself, but the conclusion drawn from it — 'unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved' — is evil. Similarly, eating foods the law prohibited is not evil in itself — but Peter's withdrawal and hypocrisy was evil. Because people could conclude: Peter abstains from foods forbidden by the law — therefore if you do not do the same, you cannot be saved. Paul could not ignore this: the truth of the Gospel was at stake. To keep that truth sound and uncorrupted, he opposed Peter to his face.

A distinction is needed here. There are two reasons someone might refuse certain foods. First, out of love for a fellow believer — to avoid causing harm to someone with a weak conscience. This is not dangerous; to bear with a brother's weakness is a good thing. Paul himself both practiced and taught this. Second, to abstain in

order to be righteous — and to eat as though eating itself would be sinful and damnable. In that case, let love and all the works of love be set aside. To refuse foods for that reason is to deny Christ, to trample His blood underfoot, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, and to despise everything holy. If we must lose one or the other, let us lose our friend and brother rather than God our Father. For if we lose God our Father, we cannot keep our friend and brother either.

Jerome, who understood neither this passage nor the epistle as a whole, thought Paul's rebuke was a staged performance, and so he excused Peter's behavior, attributing it to ignorance. But Peter's sin was hypocrisy — and by it he had effectively established the necessity of the law. He had pressured both Gentiles and Jews to turn away from the truth of the Gospel. He had given them strong reason to abandon Christ, reject grace, return to Jewish observance, and take up again the full burden of the law. All of this would have happened if Paul had not rebuked him — and through that rebuke called back the Gentiles and Jews who had been led astray by Peter's example, returning them to the freedom that is in Christ Jesus and to the truth of the Gospel.

If someone were to examine Peter's sin in full, it would appear very serious indeed — and yet it arose not from malice or ignorance, but simply from a momentary pressure and fear. We see from this what devastation a single person's failure and inconsistency can cause, if it is not noticed and corrected in time. Therefore we must not treat the article of justification carelessly — and there is good reason that we remind you of it so often and so diligently.

It is remarkable that such an excellent apostle as Peter would behave this way — the same Peter who had stood nearly alone in the Jerusalem council defending the article of justification and had prevailed, declaring that salvation comes by faith without the law. The man who had so firmly defended the truth and freedom of the Gospel now, by withdrawing from foods the law had forbidden, not only causes great harm but actually acts against his own decree. Let anyone who thinks he stands firm take heed lest he fall. No one would expect the dangers that can flow from traditions and ceremonies — yet we cannot do without them entirely. What seems more necessary than the law and its works? And yet there is great danger that through the law, people are led to deny Christ. The law often produces confidence in works, and where that exists, confidence in Christ cannot survive. Christ is easily denied and easily lost, as this example of Peter shows. Peter understood the article of justification better than we do — and yet how easily he gave occasion for a catastrophic collapse, one that could have caused all the Gentiles to abandon Paul's preaching and lose the Gospel and Christ Himself. And all of it would have been done under a holy pretense. They could have said: 'Paul, you have been teaching us that we are justified by grace without the law. But look — Peter does the opposite: he abstains from foods the law forbids, teaching us by his example that we cannot be saved unless we receive circumcision and observe the law.'

Verse 13. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

Here you can see clearly that Paul is charging Peter with hypocrisy. If Peter was being hypocritical, then he certainly knew what was true and what was not. A hypocrite does not sin out of ig-

norance — he deceives others through a performance he knows to be false. The other Jews joined Peter in this hypocrisy, Paul says — and even Barnabas, his own companion who had spent years preaching faith in Christ without the law, was swept along by it. Peter's sin is therefore plainly described as outright hypocrisy, which would have caused the ruin of the newly received Gospel if Paul had not confronted him.

It is a remarkable thing that God preserved the young church and the Gospel itself through a single person. Paul alone held firm to the truth: he had lost Barnabas, and Peter was against him. Sometimes one person can accomplish more in a council than the entire council combined. Even the papists themselves acknowledge this — pointing to Paphnutius, who stood against the whole Council of Nicaea (the best of all the councils after the Jerusalem council of the apostles) and prevailed.

I say this so we will study the article of justification carefully and keep a clear distinction between law and Gospel. In this matter we must act with no hypocrisy and yield to no one — if we wish to retain the truth of the Gospel and faith in its sound, uncorrupted form. These are easily damaged, as I have said. So in this matter, set aside human reason, which is an enemy of faith. In temptations of sin and death, reason does not reach for the righteousness of faith — it knows nothing of that — but grasps instead at its own righteousness or at best the righteousness of the law. The moment law and reason join forces, faith loses its purity. Nothing fights more fiercely against faith than the law and reason. These two enemies cannot be overcome without great effort and struggle — but overcome them we must, if we are to be saved.

Therefore, when your conscience is overwhelmed by the law and struggling under God's judgment, do not turn to reason or to the law for counsel. Rest only on grace and the word of comfort. Stand as though you had never heard of the law. Rise up to the realm of faith, where neither law nor reason give light — only the light of faith, which assures us that we are saved by Christ alone, without any law. In this way the Gospel leads us beyond the light of law and reason, into the inward depths of faith, where law and reason have no place. Yet we must also listen to the law — each in its proper time and place. When Moses was on the mountain, speaking with God face to face, there was no law, no lawgiving, no governing by law. But when he came down from the mountain, he was a lawgiver and governed the people by the law. So it is with us: the conscience must be free from the law, but the body must be obedient to it.

It is clear, then, that Paul rebuked Peter over no minor matter — he confronted him over the chief article of all Christian teaching, which Peter's hypocrisy had placed in serious danger. Barnabas and the other Jews joined in the same hypocrisy, and all of them failed — not out of ignorance or malice, but out of fear of the Jews, which so blinded their hearts that they could not see their sin. It is truly remarkable that men as outstanding as Peter, Barnabas, and the others could fall so quickly and so easily — especially on something they knew to be right and had even taught to others. It is a dangerous thing to rely on our own strength, however holy we may be, however learned, however certain we feel about what we know. In the very area where we feel most secure, we are capable of erring and falling and bringing both ourselves and others into

great danger. Therefore let us study the holy Scriptures diligently and with all humility, and let us pray earnestly that we never lose the truth of the Gospel.

We see from this that we are nothing — with all our gifts, however great — unless God sustains us. When He leaves us to ourselves, our wisdom and knowledge fail us completely. In a moment of temptation, by the subtlety of the devil, all the comforting passages of Scripture can be swept from our sight, and only the threatening passages left before our eyes, crushing and overwhelming us utterly. Let us learn this: if God withdraws His hand, we can fall quickly. Let no one boast of his own righteousness, wisdom, or gifts — but let each humble himself and pray with the apostle: 'Lord, increase our faith' (Luke 17:5).

Verse 14. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel.

This is a striking example involving such outstanding men and pillars of the church. Paul alone has his eyes open and sees the failure of Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jews who were going along with Peter's hypocrisy. The others do not see their own failure — in fact, they probably think they are doing well by accommodating the weakness of the Jewish believers. It was therefore absolutely necessary that Paul expose their failure rather than ignore it. He charges Peter, Barnabas, and the others with not walking in line with the truth of the Gospel — that is, they had deviated from it. It is a serious thing to accuse Peter of having fallen from the truth of the Gospel. He could not have been rebuked more sharply. Yet he accepted it patiently — and no doubt he gladly acknowledged his fault. I said earlier that many people have the Gospel but not the truth of the Gospel. Paul is saying the same here: Peter, Barnabas,

and the other Jews were not walking straight according to the truth of the Gospel. They had the Gospel — they even preached it — but their hypocrisy, which is incompatible with the truth of the Gospel, was effectively establishing the law instead. And establishing the law means abolishing the Gospel.

Anyone who can rightly distinguish between law and Gospel should thank God — and know that he is a genuine theologian. I confess that in times of temptation I do not know how to do it as I should. The way to make this distinction is to place the Gospel in heaven and the law on the earth. Call the righteousness of the Gospel heavenly and the righteousness of the law earthly. Keep as great a difference between them as God has set between heaven and earth, between light and darkness, between day and night. Let one be the sunlight and the day; let the other be the darkness and the night. Would to God we could separate them even further. So: when the question concerns faith or conscience, completely exclude the law and leave it on the earth. When it concerns works and daily life, light up the lantern of works and the law's righteousness. Let the sun and the brilliant light of the Gospel shine in the day; let the lantern of the law light the night. Therefore, when your conscience is terrified by the awareness of sin, say to yourself: I am down here on the earth. Let the donkey labor here, serve here, and carry the burden laid on him — that is, let the body and its members be subject to the law. But when you rise up toward heaven, leave the donkey and his burden on the earth. The conscience has nothing to do with law, works, or earthly righteousness. So the donkey stays in the valley, while the conscience climbs with Isaac

up the mountain, knowing nothing of the law and its works, but looking only to the forgiveness of sins and the pure righteousness freely given to us in Christ.

In civil life, on the other hand, obedience to the law must be firmly required. In that sphere, let nothing be spoken of the Gospel, conscience, grace, forgiveness of sins, heavenly righteousness, or Christ Himself — only Moses with the law and its works. If we hold this distinction clearly, neither side will cross its boundary. The law will stay outside of heaven — that is, outside the heart and conscience. And in turn, the freedom of the Gospel will stay outside of earth — that is, it will not govern the body and its conduct in the civil realm. Whenever the law and sin creep into heaven — into the conscience — they must be immediately driven out. When the conscience is frightened by God's wrath and judgment, it must know nothing of law and sin, only Christ. And on the other side, when grace and freedom creep into the earth — into bodily life — say to them: 'You do not belong here in the dust of physical existence. You belong to heaven.'

Peter's hypocrisy collapsed this distinction between law and Gospel, persuading the believing Jews that justification required both the Gospel and the law together. Paul could not tolerate this, and so he rebuked Peter — not to shame him publicly, but to reestablish the clear distinction: the Gospel justifies in heaven, the law governs on earth. The pope has not only mixed law and Gospel together but has turned the Gospel itself into a set of laws — and ceremonial laws at that. He has also fused civil and church matters into one confused mass — a diabolical and hellish confusion.

This point about the distinction between law and Gospel is essential to know — it contains the heart of all Christian teaching. Let everyone who loves and fears God study diligently to tell these two apart — not only in theory, but in practice, in the heart and conscience. The verbal distinction is easy enough to make. But in times of temptation you will find the Gospel is like a stranger and rare visitor to your conscience, while the law is a constant, familiar resident — because reason knows the law by nature. So when your conscience is overwhelmed by sin, which the law exposes and intensifies, say to yourself: 'There is a time to die and a time to live. There is a time to hear the law and a time to set it aside. There is a time to hear the Gospel and a time when the Gospel is not in view.' Let the law depart now and let the Gospel come — because this is not the time for the law, but for the Gospel. But you have done no good — in fact you have sinned gravely. True — but I have the forgiveness of all my sins through Christ. Yet once the inner conflict of conscience is past and external duties call, this is no time to listen to the Gospel alone — then you must follow your calling and do the work it requires.

Verse 14. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all: 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'

That is: You are a Jew, and therefore are bound to live like a Jew — to abstain from foods the law forbids. Yet you live like a Gentile: you act contrary to the law and violate it. Like a Gentile who is free from the law, you eat common and unclean foods — and in that you do rightly. But now, frightened by the arrival of brothers from the Jewish tradition, you abstain from the foods the

law prohibits and keep the law again. By doing so, you pressure the Gentile believers to keep the law as well — you force on them an obligation to observe it. For when you abstain from ordinary foods, you give the Gentiles occasion to reason this way: 'Peter abstains from the foods the Gentiles eat — foods he himself was eating before. Therefore we should avoid them too and live according to Jewish custom. Otherwise we cannot be justified or saved.' Paul, then, is not rebuking ignorance in Peter — he knew perfectly well he was free to eat with the Gentiles. He is rebuking the hypocrisy that was effectively compelling the Gentiles to adopt Jewish ways.

Living like a Jew is not evil in itself — it is a matter of indifference whether you eat pork or other meats. But to act as a Jew in such a way that you abstain from certain foods out of a matter of conscience — that is to deny Christ and overthrow the Gospel. Paul therefore, seeing where Peter's behavior was heading, confronted him and said: 'You know that keeping the law is not necessary for righteousness — we are justified only through faith in Christ. You know this — and so you have not been keeping the law. You have been transgressing it by eating everything. But now your example is compelling the Gentiles to abandon Christ and return to the law. You are giving them reason to think: faith alone is not sufficient for righteousness — the law and works are also required. This is what Peter is teaching by his example. Therefore, observing the law must be combined with faith in Christ if we are to be saved.' Peter's example was therefore harmful not only to doctrinal purity but to faith itself and to Christian righteousness. The Gentiles took from him the conclusion that keeping the law was necessary for righteousness — and if that error is accepted, Christ is of no benefit at all.

From all of this, it is clear what the conflict between Paul and Peter was really about. Paul acted with no pretense — he dealt honestly and directly. Peter was acting hypocritically — and Paul exposed it. The dispute was about maintaining pure doctrine and the truth of the Gospel, and in this cause Paul cared nothing for who might be offended. In a matter like this, all people and nations, all kings and princes, all judges and magistrates must give way. Since dealing with the law is so dangerous, and since Peter's fall was as sudden and steep as a plunge from the heights of heaven down to hell, every Christian must diligently learn to distinguish law from Gospel. Let the law rule over the body and its actions — but not over the conscience. For the conscience — that queen and bride — must not be bound by the law, but must be kept pure for her one husband, Christ alone. As Paul says: 'I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin' (2 Corinthians 11:2). Let the conscience have her bridal chamber not in the low valley, but on the high mountain, where Christ alone lies, rules, and reigns — He who does not terrify sinners or crush them, but comforts them, forgives their sins, and saves them. Therefore, let the troubled conscience hold to nothing, know nothing, set nothing before God's judgment but the word of Christ — the word of grace, of forgiveness of sins, of salvation and eternal life. Putting this into practice, however, is hard. Human reason and nature cannot cling steadfastly to Christ. They are often swept away by thoughts of law and sin, always seeking freedom in the flesh while remaining a prisoner in the conscience.

Verse 15. We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles.

That is: we were born into the righteousness of the law, into Moses, into circumcision. We bring the law with us from birth. We have the righteousness of the law by nature — as Paul said of himself in chapter one: 'being zealous for the traditions of the fathers.' Compared to the Gentiles, we are not sinners. We are not lawless or without works, as the Gentiles are. We are born Jews, born righteous, raised in righteousness. Our righteousness begins at birth, for the Jewish religion is native to us. God commanded Abraham to circumcise every male child on the eighth day, and Moses later confirmed this law. It is a great privilege, therefore, to be a Jew by birth. Yet even with this advantage — being righteous by nature, born into the law and its works, not sinners like the Gentiles — we are still not righteous before God.

This makes clear that Paul is not speaking merely about ceremonies or the ceremonial law, as some claim — he is speaking of a far weightier matter: the birth status of Jews. He denies that Jews are righteous before God even though they are born holy, are circumcised, keep the law, hold the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the patriarchs, the true worship, God, Christ, and the promises, and live in and boast of all these things. As they said: 'We are Abraham's descendants' (John 8:33), and 'We have one Father: God.' And Paul says to them in Romans: 'You bear the name Jew and rest upon the law' (Romans 2:17). So even though Peter and the other apostles were children of God, righteous according to the law, its works and righteousness, circumcision, the adoption, the covenants, the promises, and the apostleship — none of these things bring about Christian righteousness. None of them is faith in Christ, which alone (as the text continues) justifies, not the law. This is not to say the law is evil or damnable. Circumcision

and the law are not condemned because they fail to justify. Paul removes the function of justification from them simply because the false apostles were claiming that by these things, without faith, a person is justified and saved by the mere doing of the act. Paul could not accept this. Where faith is absent, everything becomes deadly — the law, circumcision, adoption, the temple, the worship of God, the promises, indeed God and Christ Himself profit nothing without faith. Paul therefore speaks generally against everything that stands in opposition to faith — not only against ceremonies.

Verse 16. Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus.

The phrase 'works of the law' is broad and includes much. We take it to mean everything that stands in contrast to grace. Whatever is not grace is law — whether judicial, ceremonial, or moral. Even if you could perfectly fulfill the command 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart' (Deuteronomy 6:5) — which no one ever has or could — you would still not be justified before God by it. For a man is not justified by the works of the law. We will say more about this later.

The 'works of the law,' then, according to Paul, means the works of the whole law — ceremonial and moral alike. If the works of the moral law do not justify, then circumcision — a work of the ceremonial law — justifies even less. So when Paul says, as he often does, that a man is not justified by the law or by the works of the law — which amount to the same thing — he is speaking of the whole law, and setting the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of the entire law. The righteousness of the law does not make a person righteous before God. But the righteousness of faith

God imputes freely, through grace, for Christ's sake. The law is without doubt holy, righteous, and good — and the works of the law are likewise holy, righteous, and good — yet they do not justify a person before God.

Works of the law can be performed both before and after justification. Many upright men even among the pagans — Xenophon, Aristides, Fabius, Cicero, Pomponius Atticus, and others — performed works of the law before justification and accomplished remarkable things. Cicero died courageously in a good and just cause. Pomponius was a man of steadfast character who loved truth — he never told a lie himself and could not tolerate it in others. Steadfastness and truth are noble virtues and excellent works of the law — yet they were not justified by them. After justification, Peter, Paul, and all other Christians have done and continue to do the works of the law — yet they are not justified by them either. Paul himself says: 'I am aware of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted' (1 Corinthians 4:4). It is clear, then, that Paul is speaking not of some part of the law, but of the whole law and all its works.

The Divinity of the Sophisters, Commonly Called the Schoolmen

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The wicked and dangerous teaching of the papists must be utterly rejected — the teaching that credits the merit of grace and forgiveness of sins to the work performed. They say that a good work done before receiving grace can earn grace by a kind of fittingness — what they call meritum de Congruo, meaning that God, being just, would fittingly reward such a work. Then, once grace is obtained, the subsequent works are said to deserve eternal life by right and by merit — what they call meritum de Condigno. Here is their example: if a man in a state of mortal sin, without grace, performs a good work from his own natural inclination — say, hearing a Mass, giving alms, or something similar — he earns grace by fittingness. Once he has that grace, he can perform works that deserve eternal life by right. For the first type of work, God owes him nothing — but because God is just and good, He is supposed to approve such a work even if done in mortal sin, and reward it with grace. Once grace is obtained, God becomes a debtor,

obligated by justice to grant eternal life. For now the work is not merely a natural work, but one performed in grace — that is, in love — and therefore meritorious in the highest degree.

This is the theology of the Antichristian kingdom, which I am reciting here so that Paul's argument can be better understood. Contrasting two opposites makes each one clearer. But beyond that, I want everyone to see how far these blind guides and leaders of the blind have strayed from the truth, and how through this wicked and blasphemous doctrine they have not only obscured the Gospel but destroyed it entirely, burying Christ without a trace. For if I — in a state of mortal sin — can do some small work that is not only acceptable to God as a natural act but can even merit grace by fittingness, and once I have received this grace I can perform works according to love and earn eternal life by right — then what need do I have for God's grace, forgiveness of sins, the promise, and the death and victory of Christ? Christ becomes useless and empty to me. I have free will and the power to do good works, by which I merit grace by fittingness first, then by right, and by the worthiness of my works — eternal life.

Such monstrous and horrible blasphemies should be preached to the Turks and Jews, not to the church of Christ. This plainly shows that the pope with his bishops, doctors, priests, and his whole religious establishment had no understanding or regard for holy things — and no concern for the health of the poor and scattered flock. If they had seen even dimly what Paul means by sin and by grace, they would never have required the people to believe such abominations and damnable lies. By mortal sin they understood only outward acts committed against the law — murder, theft, and the like. They could not see that ignorance of God, ha-

tred of God, contempt of God in the heart, ingratitude, complaining against God, and resisting God's will are also mortal sins. They could not see that the flesh cannot think, speak, or do anything that is not devilish and entirely opposed to God. If they had seen these evils deeply rooted in human nature, they would never have invented such shameless and abominable fantasies about merit by fittingness and merit by worthiness.

We must therefore define plainly and precisely what a wicked person and a mortal sinner actually is. He is such a holy and bloodthirsty hypocrite as Paul himself was when he went to Damascus to persecute Jesus of Nazareth, to destroy the doctrine of the Gospel, to murder the faithful, and to utterly overthrow the church of Christ. Who would deny that these were horrible sins? Yet Paul himself could not see them. He was so blinded by a misguided zeal for God that he thought these abominations were perfect righteousness and the highest service to God. And shall we say that those who defend such horrible sins as perfect righteousness deserve grace?

We therefore reject with Paul all merit of fittingness and merit of worthiness, and affirm that these theories are nothing but the deceits of Satan — never actually accomplished, never proven by any example. God has never given any person grace or eternal life on account of such merit. The Scholastic debates about merit of fittingness and merit of worthiness are nothing but empty fantasies of idle minds, designed for no other purpose than to draw people away from the true worship of God. The entire papal system is built on this foundation. Every religious person in that system carries this thought: by observing the rules of my holy order I can merit grace by fittingness; and by the works I do after receiving

this grace, I can accumulate such a treasury of merit that it not only secures my own eternal life but can be given or sold to others. This is what all the religious orders have taught and how they have lived. And to defend this horrible blasphemy against Christ, the papists today do everything in their power against us. Among them, the holier the hypocrite and the greater the merit-monger, the more cruel and deadly an enemy he is to the Gospel of Christ.

The True Way to Christianity

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The true way to Christianity is this: a person must first acknowledge through the law that he is a sinner, and that it is impossible for him to do any truly good work. For the law says: you are an evil tree, and therefore everything you think, speak, or do is against God. You cannot earn grace by your works. If you try, you commit an even more serious offense — because as an evil tree you can only produce evil fruit, that is, sin. And whatever does not come from faith is sin. Anyone who tries to earn grace by works done before faith is trying to please God with sins, which is nothing other than piling sin upon sin, mocking God, and provoking His anger. When a person is taught this by the law, he is terrified and humbled. He sees the full weight of his sin and finds within himself nothing resembling love for God. He acknowledges God to be right in His word, and confesses that he deserves death and eternal condemnation. The first part of Christianity, then, is the preaching of repentance and the knowledge of ourselves.

The second part is this: if you want to be saved, you cannot seek salvation through works — for God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. He was crucified and died for you, and offered up your sins in His own body. In this there is no merit, no work done before grace — only wrath,

sin, terror, and death. The law does nothing but expose sin, terrify, and humble — and in doing so, prepares us for justification and drives us to Christ. For God has revealed through His word that He will be a merciful Father to us, and without any deserving on our part — since we can deserve nothing — will freely give us forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. God gives His gifts freely to all — this is the glory and honor of His majesty. But those who insist on earning righteousness will not receive grace and eternal life as a free gift; they insist on deserving it by their works. In doing so, they would rob God of the glory of His majesty. Therefore, to defend and maintain that glory, God is compelled to send His law ahead — which, like lightning and thunder from heaven, shatters and breaks those hard, unyielding hearts.

This, in brief, is our teaching on Christian righteousness — set against the abominations and monstrous fantasies of the papists concerning merit of fittingness and merit of worthiness, and works before and after grace. A company of idle monks — who never gave any thought to God or His glory, never cared for the salvation of their own souls, were never tested by real temptation, never truly felt the weight of sin or the terror of death — invented these empty trifles and blasphemies out of their own imagination. They do not know what they are saying or teaching. What is more, they cannot produce a single example of any work, done either before or after grace, that could justify a person before God. These are nothing but empty fables and lies by which the papists deceive both themselves and others. Paul states plainly here that a man is not justified by the works of the law — whether those works come before grace (which is his subject here) or after it. It is clear, then, that

Christian righteousness is not some inherent quality embedded in human nature — as the Scholastic theologians imagine when they say:

The Divinity of the Schoolmen

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When a man does a good work, God accepts it, and in response pours love into him. This infused love — which they call charity — is, they say, a quality that takes root in the heart. They call this 'formal righteousness' (a term you should know). They cannot bear the thought that this quality, which adorns the soul as whiteness covers a wall, should not be counted as righteousness. They can rise no higher than this idea of human reason: that a person is righteous through his own formal righteousness, which is the grace that makes him acceptable to God — that is, love or charity. They attach formal righteousness to this love dwelling in the soul — love being itself a work of the law, since the law says: 'You shall love the Lord your God.' They say this righteousness is worthy of eternal life, and that whoever has it is formally righteous and also effectively righteous, because he now does good works to which eternal life is owed. This is the view of the Scholastic theologians — even the best of them.

Others went further in the wrong direction — Scotus and Occam among them — claiming that infused charity from God is not even necessary to obtain God's grace. A man can, they said, produce this love entirely by his own natural power. Scotus reasoned like this: if a man can love a creature — if a young man can

love a girl, or a greedy man can love money, which are lesser goods — then he can certainly love God, who is the greater good. If he can produce love for a creature through natural strength, he can all the more produce love for the Creator. This argument stumped all the Scholastics — none of them could answer it. But they tried.

Scripture compels us to admit, they said, that God — beyond the natural love embedded in us, with which alone He is not satisfied — also requires the love that He Himself gives. In saying this, they end up accusing God of being a tyrant and a harsh taskmaster who is not content with our keeping the law as best we can, but demands, beyond what we can fulfill by our own power, that we fulfill it with an additional quality — like fine clothing added on top. It is like a mistress who is not satisfied that her cook has prepared an excellent meal, but scolds her for not having done so while wearing jewels and a golden crown. What kind of mistress demands something her cook was never required to do and could never have? In the same way, what kind of God would require us to fulfill His law — which we supposedly keep by our natural strength — while also demanding something we cannot possibly provide?

To avoid an obvious contradiction in their argument, they make a distinction. They say the law can be fulfilled in two ways: first, according to the substance of the act; second, according to the intention of the lawgiver. According to the substance of the act, they say, we can fulfill everything the law commands. But according to the intention of the lawgiver, God is not satisfied merely with your having done what the law requires. He demands more: that you fulfill the law in charity — not the natural love you possess by nature, but a supernatural, heavenly love that He Himself supplies. But what is this but making God into a tyrant and a torturer

who demands what we cannot perform? It amounts to saying that if we are condemned, the fault lies not with us but with God, who requires His law to be fulfilled under conditions we cannot meet.

I rehearse these things in detail so you can see how far those who taught this have strayed from the true meaning of Scripture. They said that by our own natural strength we can love God above all things, or at least that we can earn eternal life by the work we perform. And because God is not content with fulfilling the law according to the substance of the act alone — but also demands fulfillment according to His intention — they conclude that Scripture requires us to have a supernatural quality poured into us from above. This is the charity they call formal righteousness — the quality that adorns and beautifies faith, and is the cause by which faith justifies us. So in their view, faith is the body and the shell; charity is the life, the core, and the form. These are the dreams of the Scholastics.

We, in place of their charity, put faith — and we say that faith lays hold of Jesus Christ, who is the form that adorns and completes faith, just as color adorns and beautifies a wall. Christian faith, then, is not an idle quality or empty shell in the heart that can coexist with mortal sin (as they claim) until charity comes along to enliven it. If it is true faith, it is a firm trust and confidence of the heart — a sure conviction by which Christ is grasped. Christ is the object of faith; and in fact, within faith Christ Himself is present. Faith therefore is a kind of hidden knowledge — or rather, a darkness that sees nothing — and yet Christ, grasped by faith, sits in this darkness, just as God in Sinai and in the temple dwelt in the midst of darkness. Our formal righteousness, therefore, is not charity adorning and completing faith. It is faith itself

— which is like a cloud in our hearts — a steadfast trust and confidence in what we cannot see, which is Christ, who though invisible is truly present.

Faith justifies because it lays hold of and possesses this treasure — Christ Himself, present within it. But this presence cannot be comprehended by us, because it dwells in darkness, as I have said. Where there is genuine trust and confidence of heart, Christ is present — even in the cloud and obscurity of faith. And this is the formal righteousness by which a person is justified — not by charity, as the papist Scholastics claim.

In summary: just as the Scholastics say that charity adorns and completes faith, we say that it is Christ who adorns and completes faith — or rather, He is the very form and fulfillment of faith. Therefore Christ, grasped by faith and dwelling in the heart, is true Christian righteousness, for which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life. Here there is no work of the law, no love or charity as the Scholastics dream of — but an entirely different kind of righteousness, a new world altogether, beyond and above the law. For Christ and faith are neither the law nor works of the law. We intend to speak of this more fully later. For now it is enough to have shown that Paul is speaking here not of the ceremonial law alone, but of the whole law.

The True Rule of Christianity

Against these empty theories and foolish dreams — as we have noted — we teach faith, and we lay out the true rule of Christianity in this way. First, a person must be instructed by the law to know himself, so that he learns to say with the prophet: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). And: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks for God; all have turned aside' (Romans 3:10-12). And: 'Against You, You only, I have sinned' (Psalm 51:4). This is how we drive people away from all ideas of earning grace by fittingness or by merit. When a person has been humbled by the law and brought to know himself, true repentance follows — for true repentance begins with the fear and judgment of God. He sees himself to be such a great sinner that he can find no way to be delivered by his own strength, works, or merits. Then he begins to understand what Paul means when he says that a person is a slave to sin; that God has imprisoned everyone under sin; and that the whole world is accountable to God. Then he sees that all the theology of the Scholastics on merit by fittingness and merit by worthiness is pure foolishness — and that the whole papal system collapses along with it.

At this point the person begins to sigh and asks: 'Who can help me?' Terrified by the law, he despairs completely of his own strength. He looks around and longs for the help of a Mediator and Savior. Then, at just the right moment, the healing word of the Gospel arrives and says: 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:2). 'Believe in Christ Jesus, crucified for your sins.' 'If you feel the weight of your sins, do not look at them in yourself — remember that they have been transferred and laid on Christ, whose wounds have made you whole.'

This is the beginning of healing and salvation. By this means we are delivered from sin, justified, and made heirs of eternal life — not for our own works and merits, but through faith, by which we lay hold of Christ. So we do acknowledge a quality and a formal righteousness in the heart — not charity, as the Scholastics teach, but faith. And yet, faith in such a way that the heart looks to nothing and grasps nothing but Christ the Savior. This is why you need to know the true definition of Christ. The Scholastics, being completely ignorant of it, made Christ into a judge and a tormentor, and invented their foolish theories about merit by fittingness and merit by worthiness.

But Christ, by His true definition, is no lawgiver — He is the forgiver of sins and the Savior. Faith lays hold of this and believes without doubt that He has accomplished works and merits far beyond any notion of fittingness or worthiness, both before and after grace. One single drop of His blood would have been enough to satisfy for all the sins of the world. But He shed it abundantly and satisfied abundantly. 'Through His own blood He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption' (Hebrews 9:12). And: 'Being justified as a gift by His grace through the re-

demption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith' (Romans 3:24-25). It is therefore a great thing to lay hold of Christ by faith — Christ who bears the sins of the world. And this faith alone is counted as righteousness, as the apostle teaches in Romans 3 and 4.

Note carefully that these three things must be held together: faith, Christ, and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and holds Him present — enclosing Him as a ring holds a precious stone. Whoever is found with this confidence in Christ dwelling in his heart, God will count as righteous. This is the means, this is the merit by which we obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness. God says: 'Because you believe in Me, and your faith lays hold of Christ whom I freely gave you to be your Mediator and High Priest — therefore you are justified and righteous.' Therefore God accepts and counts us as righteous solely through our faith in Christ.

This acceptance and imputation is absolutely necessary — for several reasons. First, we are not yet perfectly righteous. Sin still dwells in our flesh as long as we remain in this life, and God is in the process of purging it from us. Furthermore, we are sometimes left by the Holy Spirit and fall into sin, as Peter, David, and other holy men did. Yet we always have recourse to this article: our sins are covered and God will not count them against us (Psalm 32:1; Romans 4:7-8). Not that sin is absent from us — as the Scholastics taught, saying we must keep working until we feel no guilt of sin remaining. Sin truly is always in us, and godly people feel it. But it is covered and not counted against us by God, for Christ's sake. Because we lay hold of Christ by faith, all our sins are, as it were, no sins. But where Christ and faith are absent, there is no forgive-

ness or covering of sins — only the counting of sins and condemnation. This is how God wills to glorify His Son, and to be glorified Himself in us through Him.

Once we have taught faith in Christ, we also teach good works. Because you have laid hold of Christ by faith — through whom you have been made righteous — now begin to do good. Love God and your neighbor. Call upon God, give thanks to Him, praise Him, and confess Him. These are truly good works, flowing from this faith and from the joy that fills the heart when we have received forgiveness of sins freely through Christ.

Whatever crosses or hardships come afterward are easily borne and cheerfully endured. For the yoke Christ places on us is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). When sin is forgiven and the conscience freed from the burden and sting of sin, a Christian can carry all things with ease. Because everything within feels sweet and comforting, he does and endures all things willingly. But a person who walks in his own righteousness finds everything he does grievous and tiresome, because he does it against his will.

We therefore define a Christian in this way: a true Christian is one to whom God, through faith in Christ, does not count his sin. This doctrine brings tremendous comfort to poor, afflicted consciences in times of deep and inward terror. It is not without good reason that we so often repeat and impress upon your minds the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness for Christ's sake — and the fact that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and sin, especially in times of temptation. In that he is a Christian, he is above the law and sin. He has Christ the Lord of the law present and enclosed in his heart — as I have said — the way a ring holds a precious stone. Therefore when the law accuses and sin

terrifies him, he looks to Christ, and when he has laid hold of Him by faith, he has present with him the conqueror of the law, sin, death, and the devil — the one who reigns over all of these so that they cannot harm him. A Christian, rightly defined, is free from all laws and subject to no creature, inwardly or outwardly — insofar as he is a Christian, I say, not insofar as he is simply a man or a woman. That is: insofar as his conscience is adorned and clothed with this faith, with this great and immeasurable treasure — or as Paul calls it, this gift beyond description — which cannot be praised enough, for it makes us children and heirs of God. And in this way, a Christian is greater than the entire world. He carries within his heart such a gift and such a treasure that though it may seem small, it is greater than heaven and earth — for Christ, who is this gift and this treasure, is greater than all things.

While this doctrine — which pacifies and quiets the conscience — remains sound and uncorrupted, Christians become judges over all kinds of teaching and are lords over the laws of the whole world. They can say with certainty that the Turk with his Quran is condemned, because he does not walk the right way — he does not acknowledge himself to be miserable and damnable, and he does not lay hold of Christ by faith, through whom he could know his sins are forgiven. In the same way, Christians can boldly pronounce judgment on the pope — that he is condemned together with all his kingdom — because he teaches, along with all his religious followers and Scholastic theologians, that one must come to grace by merit of fittingness and then be received into heaven by merit of worthiness. The Christian says: this is not the way to justify us, and this way does not lead to heaven. I cannot earn grace by works done before grace, nor earn eternal life by works done af-

ter it. To the one who believes, sin is forgiven and righteousness is imputed. This trust and confidence makes him a child of God and heir of His kingdom — for in hope he already possesses the eternal life that has been promised to him. Through faith in Christ, therefore, all things are given to us: grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life — not by any merit of fittingness or worthiness.

The theology of the Scholastics, therefore — with their ceremonies, Masses, and the endless foundations of the papal kingdom — is the most abominable blasphemy against God: sacrilege and an outright denial of Christ, just as Peter foretold in these words: 'There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them' (2 Peter 2:1). As if to say: the Lord has redeemed and purchased us with His blood in order to justify and save us — this is the way of righteousness and salvation. But false teachers will come, denying the Lord, blaspheming the way of truth, righteousness, and salvation, and devising new paths of falsehood and destruction — and many will follow them to their ruin. Throughout that chapter, Peter paints a vivid portrait of the Papacy, which has neglected and despised the Gospel and faith in Christ, and has taught instead the works and traditions of men: merit by fittingness and by worthiness, distinctions of days and foods, vows, prayers to saints, pilgrimages, purgatory, and the like. The papists are so steeped in these fantastical ideas that they cannot understand a single syllable of the Gospel, of faith, or of Christ.

The facts make this plain. They claim for themselves the privilege that belongs to Christ alone. He alone forgives sins. He alone gives righteousness and eternal life. Yet they shamelessly and

wickedly boast that they can obtain these things by their own merits and worthiness, before and after grace. Peter and the other apostles call these damnable heresies and sects of destruction — because by them people deny Christ, trample His blood underfoot, blaspheme the Holy Spirit, and despise the grace of God. No one can fully grasp how horrible the idolatry of the papists is. The gift offered to us by Christ is beyond price — and the papists' profaning of it is equally abominable. It must not be taken lightly or forgotten, but weighed and considered carefully. And reflecting on it magnifies the grace of God and the benefit of Christ all the more, by contrast. The more deeply we understand the profanation of the papist Mass, the more we abhor and reject it — and the more we embrace the true celebration of the Lord's Supper, which the pope has abolished and turned into merchandise to be bought and sold for others' benefit. For he claims that the priest celebrating the Mass — an apostate, denying Christ and blaspheming the Holy Spirit — performs a good work at the altar, not only for himself but for others both living and dead, and for the whole church, and that he does this merely by performing the act, and by nothing else.

From all of this we can plainly see the immeasurable patience of God — that He has not long since destroyed the whole Papacy and consumed it with fire and brimstone as He did Sodom and Gomorrah. But now these brazen men go about not only to conceal but to glorify their impiety and filth. We cannot ignore this. We must therefore set forth the article of justification with all diligence, so that, like the clearest sun, it may expose the darkness of their hypocrisy and reveal their shame. This is why we so often repeat and so earnestly proclaim the righteousness of faith — so that our opponents may be put to silence, and this article established

and confirmed in our hearts. This is absolutely necessary: if we once lose this sun, we fall back into our former darkness. And it is a truly horrifying thing that the pope was ever able to bring this about in the church — that Christ was denied, trampled underfoot, mocked, and blasphemed — and that this was done even through the Gospel and the sacraments, which he darkened and twisted into such horrible abuses that he turned them against Christ, using them to build up and establish his detestable wickedness. O deep darkness! O horrible wrath of God!

Verse 16. Even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ.

This is the true way to become a Christian — to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. We must not accept the wicked interpretation of the Scholastics, who say that faith justifies only when love and good works are added to it. With this poisonous gloss the Scholastics have darkened and perverted this and similar passages in Paul — passages where he plainly attributes justification to faith alone in Christ. When a person hears that he must believe in Christ, but is then told that faith does not justify unless it is shaped and adorned by love, his faith collapses immediately. He thinks to himself: if faith without love does not justify, then faith is useless and empty, and love alone is what justifies — because unless faith is adorned and furnished with love, it counts for nothing.

To support this destructive interpretation, they cite this passage from the Corinthians: 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:1). This text is their impenetrable wall. But these men have no understanding of Paul and cannot see or grasp anything he says. They

have not only mishandled Paul's words — they have denied Christ and buried all His benefits. Therefore we must reject their interpretation as a deadly and diabolical poison, and conclude with Paul that we are justified not by faith furnished with love, but by faith only and alone.

We do agree that good works and love must also be taught — but in the right time and place, when the question is about works and not about the article of justification. Here the question is this: by what means are we justified and do we attain eternal life? To this we answer with Paul: by faith alone in Christ we are pronounced righteous, not by the works of the law or by love. This is not because we reject good works, but because we refuse to be dislodged from this anchor of our salvation — which is exactly what Satan most desires. Since we are now in the article of justification, we set aside and exclude all good works — for this matter will admit no discussion of good works. Therefore in this article we cut off all laws and all works of the law.

But the law is good, just, and holy. True. But when we are in the matter of justification, this is not the time or place to speak of the law. The question here is: who is Christ, and what benefit has He brought us? Christ is not the law. He is not my work or the work of the law. He is not my love, my chastity, my obedience, or my poverty. He is the Lord of life and death, a Mediator, a Savior, a Redeemer of those who are under the law and under sin. We are in Him by faith and He is in us (John 6:56). This bridegroom must be alone with His bride in the inner chamber — all the servants and household sent away. But afterward, when the door opens and He comes out, the servants and maids may return to attend them. Then love and good works can begin their proper work.

Let us learn to distinguish all laws — yes, even the law of God — and all works from faith and from Christ. Let us define Christ rightly and know that He is not the law, and therefore He is not a taskmaster demanding law and works. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Faith alone lays hold of this — not love, though love must follow faith as a kind of gratitude. Therefore victory over sin and death, salvation and eternal life come not by the law, not by the works of the law, not by the power of free will — but by the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Verse 16. That we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.

Paul is not speaking here only of the ceremonial law, as we have already said — he is speaking of the whole law. The ceremonial law was just as much God's law as the moral law. Circumcision, the institution of the priesthood, the temple service and ceremonies — all were commanded by God no less than the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac, that was a law and a work of God's command. This work of Abraham pleased God no less than any other work of the ceremonial law — and yet he was not justified by this work but by faith. For Scripture says: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' (Genesis 15:6).

'But after Christ was revealed,' they say, 'the ceremonial law kills and brings death.' True — but so does the law of the Ten Commandments, apart from faith in Christ. Furthermore, no law may be allowed to reign in the conscience — only the law of the Spirit and of life, by which we are set free in Christ from the law of the letter and of death, from its works, and from all sins. Not be-

cause the law is evil, but because it is unable to justify us — it produces exactly the opposite effect. To be at peace with God is a high and excellent thing, and for that we need a far greater Mediator than Moses or the law. Here we must do nothing at all — we must only receive the treasure, which is Christ, and lay hold of Him in our hearts by faith, even when we feel ourselves full of sin. The apostle's words — 'that we might be justified by faith and not by the works of the law' — are powerful and full of meaning, not empty or useless as the Scholastics suppose when they skip over them so carelessly.

You have now heard the words Paul spoke to Peter, in which he briefly summed up the chief article of all Christian doctrine — the article that makes people true Christians. He now turns to the Galatians, to whom he is writing, and concludes: since we are justified by faith in Christ, then by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Verse 16. Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

In Paul, 'flesh' does not refer — as the Scholastics imagine — to obvious and gross sins; those he names explicitly as adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, and the like. By 'flesh' Paul means what Christ means in John 3: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh' (John 3:6). Flesh therefore means all of human nature — reason and every other faculty a person possesses. This flesh, he says, is not justified by works, not even by works of the law. According to Paul, 'flesh' includes all the righteousness, wisdom, devotion, religion, understanding, and will that it is possible for a natural per-

son to have. So even if a person were as righteous as possible according to reason and the law of God, all his righteousness, works, merits, devotion, and religion would still not justify him.

The papists do not believe this. Blind and stubborn, they defend their abominations against their own conscience, continuing in their blasphemy — still mouthing these damnable words: 'Whoever does this or that good work earns forgiveness of sins; whoever enters this or that holy order and keeps its rule, we promise eternal life.' It is impossible to express what a horrible blasphemy it is to attribute to the teachings of demons, to the decrees and ordinances of men, to the wicked traditions of the pope, and to the hypocritical works and merits of monks and friars — what Paul the apostle of Christ takes away even from the law of God. For if no flesh is justified by the works of the law, even less will flesh be justified by the rule of Benedict, Francis, or Augustine — rules in which there is not a trace of true faith in Christ, but only the insistence that whoever keeps them has eternal life.

I have often marveled that the church could endure and continue through so many years of such profound darkness and error, with these destructive sects holding power. Some there were whom God called through the written Gospel and through baptism. These walked in simplicity and humility of heart, thinking that monks and friars and those anointed by bishops were the truly religious and holy ones, while they themselves were common and secular — not worthy to be compared to them. Finding in themselves no good works to set against God's wrath and judgment, they fled to the death and suffering of Christ and were saved in this simplicity.

Horrible and unspeakable is the wrath of God in that He punished the papists' contempt for the Gospel and for Christ, and their ingratitude, by giving them over to a reprobate mind. Blaspheming and denying Christ in His very office, they received in place of the Gospel the abominable rules, ordinances, and traditions of men, which they devoutly revered and honored — and indeed placed far above the word of God. At last they were forbidden to marry and were bound to a forced celibacy in which they were outwardly defiled by every kind of horrible wickedness: adultery, fornication, impurity, sodomy, and every other abomination. This was the fruit of that foul celibacy.

So God, punishing sin with sin, gave them over inwardly to a reprobate mind and outwardly allowed them to fall into such horrible abominations — and justly so, because they blasphemed the only Son of God, in whom the Father willed to be glorified, and whom He delivered to death so that all who believe in Him might be saved through Him — and not through their own abominable rules and orders. 'Those who honor Me I will honor,' He says (1 Samuel 2:30). God is honored in His Son. Whoever believes that the Son is our Mediator and Savior honors the Father — and God in turn honors him, adorning him with His gifts: forgiveness of sins, righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. But on the other side: 'Those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed' (1 Samuel 2:30).

This then is a general conclusion: by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. The law of God is greater than the whole world — it encompasses all people, and the works of the law far surpass the most glorious self-invented works of all merit-mon-

gers. Yet Paul says neither the law nor its works justify. We therefore conclude with Paul: faith alone justifies. This proposition he now sets out to confirm.

Verse 18. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!

If it is true, he says, that we are justified by Christ, then it is impossible that we should still be sinners who need the law to justify us. Conversely, if it is not true — if we must be justified by the law and its works — then it is impossible that we could be justified by Christ. One of these two must be false. Either we are not justified by Christ, or we are not justified by the law. The truth is we are justified by Christ, therefore we are not justified by the law. His reasoning is this: if we seek to be justified by Christ and yet, after being justified, are still found to be sinners who need the law — if, that is, those who are righteous in Christ are not truly righteous but still need the law to justify them — then Christ is nothing but a lawgiver and a minister of sin. That would mean the person justified and made holy in Christ is not truly justified or holy but still needs the righteousness and holiness of the law.

But we are in fact justified and made righteous in Christ — for the truth of the Gospel teaches that a person is not justified by the law but by Christ. Now if those who are justified in Christ are still found to be sinners — still belonging to the law and under the law, as the false apostles teach — then they are not yet justified. For the law still accuses them, shows them to be sinners, and demands works of the law as necessary for their justification. The conclusion then follows: Christ is not a justifier but a minister of the law.

With these words Paul forcefully charges the false apostles and all merit-mongers with twisting everything upside down. They turn the law into grace and grace into the law, Moses into Christ and Christ into Moses. They teach that besides Christ and all His righteousness, the observance of the law is also necessary for justification. By this intolerable distortion they effectively make the law into Christ — they attribute to the law what properly belongs to Christ alone. 'If you do the works of the law,' they say, 'you will be saved; if you do not do them, you will not be justified no matter how much you believe in Christ.' Now if Christ does not justify but is instead a minister of sin — as their doctrine necessarily implies — then Christ is nothing more than the law. We receive from Him nothing other than what we already have from the law: the accusation that we are sinners. So Christ as minister of sin simply sends us back to the law and to Moses as our justifier.

It is therefore inevitable that the papists and all who do not truly understand the righteousness of Christ must make Christ into Moses and the law, and make the law into Christ. They teach: 'Yes, faith in Christ justifies — but you must also keep the commandments of God. For it is written: If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17). At this very first move, Christ is denied and faith is abolished — because what belongs to Christ alone is attributed to the commandments of God and to the law. Christ, by His true definition, is the Justifier and Redeemer from sins. If I attribute this to the law, then the law becomes my justifier, delivering me from sins by my obedience to it. The law is now Christ. And Christ loses His name, His office, and His glory entirely — He becomes nothing but a minister of the law, reprov-

ing, accusing, and frightening the sinner, and sending him to someone else who can justify him. That is the law's proper office, not His.

Christ's proper office is this: after the law has condemned a person as guilty, to raise him up again and free him from his sins — if he believes the Gospel. For to all who believe, Christ is 'the end of the law for righteousness' (Romans 10:4; John 1:29). He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But the papists and Anabaptists, not understanding this doctrine, turn everything around — making Christ into Moses and Moses into Christ. And this, though they would say otherwise, is their real foundational claim: that Christ is Moses. They also mock and ridicule us for teaching faith so earnestly and so insistently. 'Ha!' they say, 'Faith, faith — just wait and try to get to heaven by faith. No, you must do greater and harder things. You must fulfill the law, as it says: Do this and you shall live' (Luke 10:28). 'This faith you make so much of does nothing but make people careless, idle, and negligent.' So they have become nothing but ministers of the law and workers of the law, calling people back from baptism, faith, and the promises of Christ to the law and works — turning grace into law and the law into grace.

Who would believe that these two things could be so easily confused and mixed together? There is no one so dull as to miss such an obvious distinction between law and grace. The very meaning of the words makes the difference clear. Who does not understand that the words law and grace differ in name and in meaning? It is therefore a monstrous thing that, with so plain a distinction before them, our opponents have fallen into such devilish perverseness as to mingle law and grace together and trans-

form Christ into Moses. For this reason I keep repeating and teaching: this doctrine of faith is very clear as far as words go, and the distinction between law and grace is easy to grasp verbally — but putting it into practice in the heart is very hard.

The pope and his Scholastic doctors openly acknowledge that law and grace are distinct things — and yet in practice they teach the exact opposite. 'Faith in Christ,' they say, 'whether obtained through natural abilities or infused by God, is a dead faith if love is not joined to it.' Where has the distinction between law and grace gone? They distinguish them in name, but in effect they call grace 'love.' This is what all of them do who strictly demand observance of the law and attribute justification to law and works. Therefore whoever does not fully understand the article of justification must inevitably confuse and mix together law and grace.

Let everyone therefore diligently learn, above all things, to distinguish between law and grace — not just in words, as the pope and the Anabaptists do, but in practice. In words they acknowledge these two to be distinct — but in deed, as I have said, they mix them together, for they will not grant that faith justifies without works. If that is true, then Christ profits me nothing. For however perfect my faith may be, in their view it does not justify if it lacks love. Christ grasped by faith is then no justifier; grace counts for nothing; and faith cannot be true faith without love — or, as the Anabaptists add, without the cross, without suffering, without the shedding of blood. But when love is added to faith, then at last it is true faith and justifies.

With this doctrine these lying spirits and destructive sects once again darken the benefit of Christ in our own day. They strip from Him the glory of being the Justifier and make Him a minister of

sin. They are in every way like the false apostles. Just as those false apostles required circumcision and observance of the law in addition to faith in Christ — denying that justification by faith was possible without circumcision, saying 'unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved' — so today these strict enforcers of the law demand, alongside the righteousness of faith, the keeping of God's commandments, citing: 'Do this and you shall live' (Luke 10:28), and 'If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17). Not one of them — however wise — understands the distinction between law and grace.

We make the distinction and say: the question here is not whether good works should be done, whether the law is good, holy, and just, or whether it should be kept — that is a different question entirely. Our question is about justification: does the law justify or not? Our opponents refuse to hear this. They will not answer this question or make the distinction we make. They simply insist that good works must be done and the law must be kept. We know that well enough. But because these are distinct matters, we will not allow them to be mingled together. We will address the topic of good works in its proper place. But since we are now dealing with justification, we set aside all good works here. Our opponents fight so earnestly for works, attributing to them the entire function of justifying — but this is to strip Christ of His glory and assign it to works.

This is therefore a powerful argument, which I have often used to my great comfort: 'If while seeking to be made righteous by Christ…' It is as if Paul were saying: if we, being justified by Christ, are still counted as unjustified sinners who must yet be justified by the law — then we must not seek justification in Christ but in the

law. But if justification comes by the law, then it does not come by grace. And if it does not come by grace, then what has Christ accomplished through His death, His preaching, His victory over the law, sin, and death, and His sending of the Holy Spirit? We must conclude: either we are justified by Christ, or through Him we are made guilty and condemned. If the law justifies, then it necessarily follows that we are made sinners through Christ, and so Christ is a minister of sin. If that is the case, then the proposition must be stated this way: everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is a sinner guilty of eternal death, and unless he flees to the law and performs its works, he will not be saved.

Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament, often speaks of faith in Christ and exalts it highly, saying that whoever believes in Him is saved, will not perish, will not be judged, will not be put to shame, and has eternal life. But our opponents say the opposite: whoever believes in Him is condemned, because he has a faith without works, and faithless works condemn. They turn everything upside down — making Christ a destroyer and a murderer, and Moses a Savior. And is this not a horrible blasphemy — to teach that by doing good works you become worthy of eternal life, but by believing in Christ you become guilty of eternal death? That keeping the law saves, and faith in Christ condemns?

Our opponents may not use these exact words — but in effect this is their doctrine. 'Infused faith,' they say — what they specifically call faith in Christ — does not free us from sin. Only faith furnished with love does that. This means faith in Christ without the law does not save us. This is simply to say that Christ leaves us in our sins and under God's wrath and makes us guilty of eternal death. On the other side, if you keep the law and do its works, then

faith justifies you because it has works to accompany it — without which faith is useless. Therefore works justify, not faith. O horrible impiety! What destructive and cursed doctrine this is!

Paul builds his argument on a logical impossibility and a clear either/or. If we, being justified in Christ, are still found to be sinners who cannot be justified except by some other means — namely, the law — then Christ cannot justify us; He only accuses and condemns us. From this it would necessarily follow that Christ died in vain, and that passages like 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29) and 'He who believes in Him has eternal life' (John 3:36) are false — indeed, the whole of Scripture, which bears witness that Christ is the Justifier and Savior of the world, would be false. For if we are still found sinners after being justified by Christ, it follows necessarily that those who fulfill the law are justified without Christ. If that were true, we would be no different from Turks, Jews, or pagans — people who use the name and word of God outwardly, but in reality utterly deny Christ and His word. It is therefore a serious impiety to say that faith does not justify unless it is adorned with love. But if our opponents insist on this doctrine, why do they not simply reject faith in Christ altogether — since they make it nothing more than an empty quality in the soul that accomplishes nothing by itself? Why do they not say plainly that works justify and not faith? Indeed, why do they not flatly deny — not only Paul, but the entire Gospel (as in fact they do) — which attributes righteousness to faith alone and not to works? For if faith and works together justify, then Paul's entire argument is false — he who plainly declares that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Verse 17. Is Christ then a minister of sin?

This is a Hebrew figure of speech, which Paul also uses in 2 Corinthians 3, where he speaks with great clarity and depth about two ministries: the ministry of the letter and the Spirit, of the law and grace, of death and life. He says there that Moses, the minister of the law, exercises what he calls the ministry of sin and of death and condemnation. Paul regularly gives such sharp names to the law, and among all the apostles he alone speaks this way. It is very important for those who study the holy Scriptures to understand this manner of speech.

A minister of sin is simply a lawgiver or teacher of the law — one who instructs people in good works and love, requires them to bear the cross and afflictions, and follow the example of Christ and the saints. Whoever teaches and requires these things is a minister of the law, of sin, of wrath, and of death. By this teaching he does nothing but terrify and torment people's consciences and imprison them under sin. For human nature cannot fulfill the law. Even in those who are justified and have the Holy Spirit, 'the law of the members wars against the law of the mind' (Romans 7:23). What will it do then in the wicked, who have no Holy Spirit? Therefore whoever teaches that righteousness comes by the law does not understand what he is saying or claiming. Still less does he keep the law. He deceives himself and others, laying on them a burden they cannot bear, requiring what is impossible — and in the end drives himself and his followers to despair.

The proper function and purpose of the law is to accuse and condemn those who live in complacency — to make them see that they stand in danger of sin, wrath, and eternal death, so that they are terrified and brought to the very edge of despair, trembling at

the rustle of a leaf. In that condition, they are under the law. For the law demands perfect obedience to God and condemns everyone who does not achieve it. And it is certain that no living person can render this obedience — which God nonetheless strictly demands. The law therefore does not justify but condemns, according to the word: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law' (Galatians 3:10). Whoever teaches the law, then, is a minister of the law.

It is therefore not without reason that Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 calls the minister of the law a minister of sin — because the law exposes and reveals sin, which without the law lies dormant. The knowledge of sin — not the shallow, theoretical knowledge of hypocrites, but the genuine knowledge that sees God's wrath against sin and truly feels a foretaste of death — terrifies the heart, drives it to despair, and kills (Romans 7). That is why these teachers of the law and works are called oppressors and tyrants in Scripture. Just as the taskmasters in Egypt crushed the children of Israel with bodily servitude, so these lawgivers and taskmasters drive people into the most miserable bondage of soul, and eventually into despair and utter ruin. They know neither themselves nor the power of the law. It is impossible for them to find peace and quiet of conscience in times of deep inward terror and in the agony of death — even if they have kept the law, loved their neighbors, done many good works, and endured great sufferings. For the law always terrifies and accuses: 'You have never fulfilled everything the law commands — cursed is the one who has not done everything written in it.' So the terrors in the conscience remain and keep growing. Unless such teachers of the law are raised up by faith and the righteousness of Christ, they are driven headlong into despair.

This was powerfully illustrated when the law was given, as we read in Exodus 19 and 20. Moses brought the people out of their tents to meet with the Lord, so that they might hear Him speak from the dark cloud. The people — who had just promised to do everything God commanded — were overcome with trembling and fear, drew back, and standing at a distance said to Moses: 'Who can endure seeing this fire and hearing the thunder and the trumpet blast? You speak to us and we will listen — but do not let God speak to us, or we will die' (Exodus 20:19). So the proper work of the law is to lead us out of our tents and settled places — out of the peace, security, and self-confidence in which we dwell — and bring us before the presence of God, to reveal His wrath and set our sins before us. At that point the conscience feels that it has not satisfied the law and cannot satisfy it, and cannot bear the wrath of God that the law reveals when it brings us like this before God's presence — when it frightens us, accuses us, and sets our sins before our eyes. Standing there is impossible, and so we flee in terror, crying out like the children of Israel: 'We will die, we will die! Let not the Lord speak to us — let him speak through you instead.'

Whoever teaches that faith in Christ does not justify without observing the law makes Christ a minister of sin — that is, a teacher of the law who preaches the same doctrine as Moses. By this view, Christ is no Savior, no giver of grace, but a cruel tyrant who demands what no person can perform — just as Moses did. See how all the merit-mongers take Christ to be nothing but a new lawgiver, and the Gospel to be a book of new laws about works, much as the Turks dream of their Quran. But as for laws, Moses provides enough. The Gospel is the proclamation of Christ, who forgives sins, gives grace, justifies, and saves sinners. The com-

mandments found in the Gospel are not themselves the Gospel — they are expositions of the law and matters that flow out from the Gospel.

To sum up: if the law is a ministry of sin, then it is also a ministry of wrath and death. For as the law reveals sin, so it terrifies a person — showing him his sin and the wrath of God, and filling him with terror of death and condemnation. The conscience immediately draws the conclusion: 'You have not kept God's commandments, therefore God is angry with you.' And it sees this as an inescapable consequence: 'I have sinned, therefore I must die.' So the ministry of sin is the ministry of wrath and condemnation. For once sin is revealed, the wrath of God, death, and condemnation immediately follow. This is why many people, unable to endure the judgment and wrath of God that the law sets before their eyes, take their own lives.

Verse 17. May it never be!

As if to say: Christ is not the minister of sin — He is the giver of righteousness and eternal life. Therefore Paul keeps Moses and Christ far apart. Let Moses remain in his proper place — let him be the teacher of the letter and the enforcer of the law, let him torment and convict sinners. But believers, Paul says, have a different teacher in their conscience — not Moses but Christ, who has abolished the law and sin, has overcome the wrath of God, and has destroyed death. He invites all who labor and are burdened with every kind of evil to come to Him (Matthew 11:28). When we flee to Him, Moses with his law vanishes entirely — his very grave can no longer be found. Sin and death can harm us no more. For Christ, our teacher, is Lord over the law, sin, and death — so that those

who believe in Him are delivered from all three. The proper office of Christ, then, is to deliver from sin and from death. This is what Paul teaches and repeats throughout his letters.

The law condemns and kills us, but Christ justifies and restores us to life. The law stuns us and drives us from God; but Christ reconciles us to God and opens the way for us to come boldly before Him — for He is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29). And if the sin of the world is taken away, then it is taken away from me too, when I believe in Him. Where sin is taken away, the wrath of God, death, and condemnation are taken away as well. In the place of sin comes righteousness; in the place of wrath, reconciliation and grace; in the place of death, life; and in the place of condemnation, salvation. Let us learn to live this distinction — not in words only, but in life and real experience, with inward feeling. For where Christ is, there must be joy of heart and peace of conscience, because Christ is our reconciliation, righteousness, peace, life, and salvation. Whatever the troubled conscience longs for, it finds in Christ abundantly. Paul now sets out to expand this argument and continues as follows.

Verse 18. For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

As if he were saying: I have not preached in order to rebuild what I once tore down. If I did, I would not only labor in vain but would make myself a transgressor and undo everything — just as the false apostles do. That is, I would turn grace and Christ back into the law and Moses, and turn the law and Moses back into grace and Christ. Through the ministry of the Gospel I have abolished sin, sorrow of heart, wrath, and death. For this is what I preached: 'Your conscience, O man, is subject to the law, sin, and

death — from which no human being or angel can deliver you. But now the Gospel comes and proclaims forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, who has abolished the law and destroyed sin and death. Believe in Him, and you will be delivered from the curse of the law and from the tyranny of sin and death. You will be made righteous and have eternal life.'

See how I have destroyed the law through the preaching of the Gospel — so that it should no longer reign in your conscience. When the new Guest, Christ Jesus, comes to dwell in the new house, Moses the old occupant must make way for Him and depart. Where Christ the new Guest has come to dwell, there sin, wrath, and death have no place. There dwells only grace, righteousness, joy, life, true confidence in the Father — who is now pacified and reconciled to us, gracious, patient, and full of mercy for His Son Christ's sake. Should I then — by driving out Christ and demolishing the kingdom I built through Gospel preaching — now rebuild the law and restore the kingdom of Moses? That is exactly what I would do if I taught circumcision and observance of the law as necessary for salvation, as the false apostles do. By doing so I would restore sin and death in the place of righteousness and life. For the law does nothing but expose sin, bring God's wrath, kill, and destroy.

What are the papists — even the best of them — but destroyers of the kingdom of Christ and builders of the kingdom of the devil: the kingdom of sin, wrath, and eternal death? They destroy the church, which is God's building — not by the law of Moses as the false apostles did, but by human traditions and the teachings of

demons. And in the same way, the confused and fanatical minds of today and of the future do and will destroy what we have built, and do and will rebuild what we have destroyed.

But by the grace of Christ, holding fast to the article of justification, we know with certainty that we are justified and counted righteous before God by faith alone in Christ. Therefore we do not mix together law and grace, faith and works. We keep them as far apart as possible. Let everyone who fears God mark this distinction carefully, and let it take root not as mere words but in practice and inward experience. So that when he hears that good works ought to be done and the example of Christ followed, he can judge rightly and say: 'Good — I will gladly do all these things.' 'What then follows? You will be saved and obtain eternal life?' 'No — not by that.' 'I grant that I ought to do good works, patiently endure troubles and afflictions, and even shed my blood for Christ's sake if need be — but I am not justified by these things, and I do not obtain salvation by them.'

We must not drag good works into the article of justification, as the monks have done. They claim that not only good works but even the punishments and sufferings that criminals endure for their crimes deserve eternal life. When a criminal is brought to the gallows or place of execution, the monks comfort him this way: 'Endure this shameful death willingly and patiently — if you do, you will deserve forgiveness of your sins and eternal life.' How terrible this is — that a wretched thief, a murderer, a robber should be so miserably misled in his final moments of agony, that at the very point of death — about to be hanged or beheaded — he is turned away from the Gospel and the sweet promises of Christ, which alone can bring comfort and salvation. Instead he is told to

hope for pardon of his sins through his patient endurance of the disgraceful death he suffers for his crimes. What is this but to pile utter destruction on top of a person already in the most wretched misery — and to point him toward hell through a false trust in his own dying?

By this the hypocrites plainly show that they neither teach nor understand a single letter about grace, the Gospel, or Christ. They retain the outward name of the Gospel and of Christ only to deceive the hearts of the people. In reality they deny and reject Christ, attributing more authority to human traditions than to the Gospel of Christ. The many forms of false worship, the many religious orders, the many ceremonies and self-invented works that were devised to earn grace, righteousness, and eternal life — all of these testify that this is true. In their confessions they make no mention of faith or the merit of Christ, but teach and promote the satisfactions and merits of men. This is plainly visible in the form of absolution used among the monks — those who counted themselves more devout and religious than others. I think it worth recording here, so that those who come after us may see how great and how horrible the pope's kingdom is.

The form of a monkish absolution: God forgive you, my brother. May the merit of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the blessed virgin Mary, and of all the saints; the merit of your order, the strictness of your religious rule, the humility of your confession, the contrition of your heart, and the good works which you have done and shall do for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ — may all of these be available to you for the remission of your sins, the increase of merit and grace, and the reward of everlasting life. Amen.

You hear the merit of Christ mentioned in those words — but weigh them carefully and you will find that Christ is utterly useless there, and that the glory and name of Justifier and Savior has been stripped from Him and given to monkish merits. Is this not to take the name of God in vain? Is this not to confess Christ in words while in reality denying His power and blaspheming His name? I myself was once caught in this same error. Though I confessed with my mouth that Christ suffered and died for human redemption, in my heart I thought Him to be a judge who must be appeased by my observance of my religious rule. So when I prayed or said Mass, I would add at the end: 'O Lord Jesus, I come to You, and I pray that the burdens and strictness of my religious rule may fully compensate for all my sins.' But now I give thanks to God the Father of all mercies, who called me out of darkness into the light of His glorious Gospel and gave me rich knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord — for whose sake I count all things as loss, yes, as rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness from the rule of Augustine, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be praise and glory forever. Amen.

We conclude therefore with Paul that we are justified by faith alone in Christ, without the law. Now once a man is justified and possesses Christ by faith — knowing that He is his righteousness and life — he will not be idle. Like a good tree he will bear good fruit. For the person who believes has the Holy Spirit — and where the Holy Spirit dwells, He will not permit a man to be idle. He stirs him up to every exercise of reverence and godliness and true religion: to love God, to patiently endure afflictions, to pray, to give thanks, and to show love to all people.

We have now worked through the first argument, in which Paul contends that either we cannot be justified by the law, or Christ must necessarily be a minister of sin. But that is impossible — therefore we conclude that justification does not come by the law. We have treated this passage at length, as it deserves — and yet it can never be fully grasped or expressed.

Verse 19. For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

These are remarkable words and an unfamiliar kind of expression that human reason cannot understand at all. Though brief, they are spoken with great intensity and force of spirit — almost as if in holy indignation. As if Paul were saying: why do you boast so much about the law? In this matter I want nothing to do with it. But if you insist on the law, I have a law too. Moved as if by the Spirit's indignation, he gives the name 'law' to grace itself — applying a new title to the work and effect of grace, as a rebuke to the law of Moses and to the false apostles who insisted the law was necessary for justification. He sets law against law. This is a rich and comforting way of speaking, found throughout the Scriptures and especially in Paul: law set against law, sin against sin, death against death, captivity against captivity, hell against hell, altar against altar, lamb against lamb, Passover against Passover.

Romans 8 says: 'For sin He condemned sin' (Romans 8:3). Psalm 68 and Ephesians 4 say: 'He led captivity captive' (Psalm 68:18; Ephesians 4:8). Hosea 13 says: 'O death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?' (Hosea 13:14). Similarly Paul says here that through the law he died to the law. As if to say: the law of Moses accuses and condemns me — but against this accusing and condemning law, I have another law: grace and free-

dom. This law accuses the accusing law and condemns the condemning law. So death kills death — but this death-killing death is life itself. It is called the death of death by an abundance of the Spirit, or a fierce opposition to death. So too righteousness borrows the name of sin because it condemns sin — and this condemning of sin is true righteousness.

Paul here appears to be a heretic — the greatest of all heretics — and his heresy sounds strange and monstrous. He says that being dead to the law, he lives to God. The false apostles taught: 'Unless you live according to the law, you are dead to God.' Paul says the exact opposite: 'If you are not dead to the law, you cannot live to God.' The doctrine of our opponents today is just like the false apostles' doctrine of that time: 'If you want to live to God, live according to the law.' But we say the contrary: 'If you want to live to God, you must be utterly dead to the law.' Human reason and wisdom cannot understand this doctrine and therefore always teaches the reverse: if you want to live to God, keep the law, for it is written: 'Do this and you shall live' (Luke 10:28). This is the fundamental principle among all theologians of that school: whoever lives according to the law, lives to God. Paul says the opposite: we cannot live to God unless we are thoroughly dead to the law. We must therefore rise to this high altitude and be assured that we are far above the law — utterly dead to it. If we are dead to the law, the law has no power over us, just as it has no power over Christ, who delivered us from it that we might live to God. All of this Paul says to prove that we are not justified by the law but by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Paul is not speaking here only of the ceremonial law, as we have already explained at greater length, but of the whole law — ceremonial and moral alike. For a Christian, the entire law has been done away with; he is dead to it. This does not mean the law has been utterly abolished: it remains, lives, and reigns in the wicked. But a godly person is dead to the law, just as he is dead to sin, the devil, death, and hell — all of which nevertheless remain, and the world along with all the wicked still lives under them. When the papist says only the ceremonial law is abolished, understand instead that Paul and every Christian is dead to the whole law — even though the law remains.

Consider this illustration: Christ, rising from the dead, is free from the grave — and yet the grave still stands. Peter is freed from prison, the paralyzed man from his mat, the young man from his coffin, the girl from her deathbed — and yet the prison, the mat, the coffin, and the deathbed all remain. In the same way, the law is done away with when I am no longer subject to it; it is dead when I die to it — and yet it remains. Because I die to it through another law, it dies to me, just as the grave of Christ, the prison of Peter, and the girl's deathbed remain — yet Christ by His resurrection is freed from the grave, Peter by his deliverance is freed from the prison, and the girl through life is freed from her deathbed.

The words 'I am dead to the law' therefore carry great force. Paul does not say: 'I am free from the law for a time,' or 'I am master over the law' — he says simply: 'I am dead to the law,' that is, I have nothing to do with it. Paul could not have made a stronger argument against justification by the law than to say: 'I am dead to the law — I care nothing for it, and therefore I am not justified by it.'

To die to the law means to be unbound from the law — to be free from it and to be done with it. Let everyone who would live to God strive to be found outside the law and to come out of the grave with Christ. The soldiers were astonished when Christ rose from the grave, and those who saw the girl raised from death to life were amazed. Human reason is similarly astonished and baffled when it hears that we cannot be justified unless we are dead to the law — for it cannot reach this mystery. But we know that when we lay hold of Christ by faith inwardly in the conscience, we enter a new law that swallows up the old law which held us captive. Just as the grave in which Christ lay became empty after He rose — He was gone — so when I believe in Christ I rise with Him and die to my grave, which is the law. The law no longer holds me. I have escaped from my prison and my grave, which was the law. It has no right to accuse me or hold me any longer — for I am risen.

People's consciences must be carefully instructed so that they clearly understand the difference between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of grace. The righteousness of grace — the liberty of conscience — belongs in no way to the flesh. The flesh may not be free. It must remain in the grave, the prison, the sickbed. It must be subject to the law and labored hard under its discipline. But the Christian conscience must be dead to the law — free from it, with nothing to do with it. This knowledge is valuable, for it brings great comfort to troubled consciences. When you see a person terrified and crushed by the weight and feeling of his sin, say to him: 'Brother, you are making a mistake. You have put the law in your conscience, where it does not belong — it belongs in the flesh. Wake up, rise up, and remember that you must believe in Christ, the conqueror of the law and sin. By this faith you will rise

above and beyond the law into the heaven of grace, where there is no law and no sin. Though the law and sin remain, they have no claim on you — for you are dead to the law and to sin.'

This is easy to say, but blessed is the person who can actually lay hold of it in a moment of distress — who can say, when sin overwhelms him and the law accuses him: 'What does this have to do with me, O law, that you accuse me and say I have committed many sins? Yes, I grant that I have committed many sins — and still commit them daily, without number. But this is no longer my concern. I am deaf to you now; you speak to me in vain, for I am dead to you. If you want to deal with sins, go to the flesh and its members — my servants. Teach them, discipline them, crucify them. But do not trouble me, the conscience — a queen and a lady who has nothing to do with you. I am dead to you. I now live to Christ, under another law — the law of grace, which rules over sin and the law.' By what means? By faith in Christ, as Paul will explain next.

But this seems a strange and astonishing definition: that to live to the law is to die to God, and to die to the law is to live to God. These two statements stand directly against human reason, and no clever Scholastic or law-worker can understand them. But here is the true meaning. He who lives to the law — seeking to be justified by the works of the law — remains a sinner and is therefore dead and condemned. For the law cannot justify or save him; it can only accuse, terrify, and kill him. Therefore, to live to the law is to die to God, and conversely, to die to the law is to live to God. If you would live to God, you must die to the law. If you choose to live to

the law, you will die to God. To live to God, then, is to be justified by grace — by faith — for Christ's sake, without the law and without works.

This then is the proper and true definition of a Christian: he is a child of grace and forgiveness of sins, because he is under no law but above the law, sin, death, and hell. Just as Christ is free from the grave and Peter from the prison, so a Christian is free from the law. The relationship between the justified conscience and the law is like the relationship between Christ raised from the grave and the grave itself — or between Peter released from prison and the prison. Just as Christ through His death and resurrection is now free from the grave, which can no longer hold Him — the stone rolled away, the seals broken, the guards astonished, He rises and departs unhindered — and just as Peter by his release goes wherever he wishes, so the conscience is delivered from the law by grace. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. The flesh does not understand where this comes from or where it goes, because the flesh can only reason according to the law. But the spirit says: 'Let the law accuse me, let sin and death terrify me as much as they will — I will not despair. For I have law against law, sin against sin, death against death.'

When I feel the sting and remorse of conscience on account of sin, I look to that bronze serpent, Christ hanging on the cross (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14). There I find a sin against my sin — a sin that accuses and devours mine. This other sin, the sin laid on the flesh of Christ, who takes away the sins of the world, is almighty. It condemns and swallows up my sin. So my sin is condemned by sin — that is, by Christ crucified, who was made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God through Him

(2 Corinthians 5:21). In the same way I find death in my flesh, afflicting and killing me — but I have within me a contrary death, which is the death of death, for it crucifies and swallows up my death.

These things are not accomplished by the law or by works, but by Christ crucified, on whose shoulders rest all the evils of humanity: the law, sin, death, the devil, and hell. All of these die in Him, for by His death He destroyed them. We must receive this gift of Christ with a firm faith. Just as Christ alone — not the law or any work — is offered to us, so nothing is required of us but faith alone, by which we lay hold of Christ and believe that our sins and our death are condemned and abolished in the sin and death of Christ.

We therefore always have solid and certain arguments that necessarily conclude justification comes by faith alone. For how could the law and works accomplish justification when Paul is so forceful against both the law and works — saying plainly that we must be dead to the law if we are to live to God? If we are dead to the law and the law is dead to us, it has nothing to do with us. How then could it contribute anything to our justification? We must therefore say that we are justified by grace alone — by faith alone in Christ — without the law and without works.

The blind Scholastics do not understand this, and so they dream that faith does not justify unless it performs works of love. By this move, faith in Christ is rendered useless and ineffective, since the power of justifying is taken away from it unless it is furnished with love. But let us set aside the law and love for another time, and rest only on the point before us now: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross and bore in His body my sins, the law, death, the devil, and hell. These invincible enemies and

tyrants oppress, trouble, and afflict me — and I am concerned with how I may be delivered from their power, justified, and saved. Here I find no law, no work, no love capable of delivering me from their tyranny. There is no one but the Lord Jesus alone who takes away the law, kills and destroys my death in His own body, and by this means plunders hell, judges and crucifies the devil, and throws him down into his pit. In short, all the enemies who once tormented and oppressed me, Christ Jesus has brought to nothing — He has disarmed them, made a public display of them, and triumphed over them openly, so that they no longer rule over me but are compelled to obey me (Colossians 2:15).

From all of this we see plainly that there is nothing here for us to do. Our part is only to hear that these things have been done and accomplished in this way, and to receive them by faith. This is true, well-formed, and furnished faith. When I have thus laid hold of Christ by faith, and through Him am dead to the law, justified from sin, delivered from death, the devil, and hell — then I do good works, love God, give thanks to Him, and show love to my neighbor. But this love and these works that follow do not form or adorn my faith — my faith forms and adorns love. This is our theology: it seems strange and marvelous to human reason — even foolish. It says I am not only blind and deaf to the law, not only delivered and freed from it, but wholly dead to it.

This sentence of Paul — 'through the law I died to the law' — is full of comfort. If it enters a person's heart in a moment of need and takes firm hold with genuine understanding, it can equip him to stand against every danger of death and every terror of conscience and sin, however fiercely they assail him, accuse him, and drive him toward despair. Every person is tested — if not during

life, then certainly at death. There the law accuses and shows him his sins, and his conscience immediately says: 'You have sinned.' If you firmly grasp what Paul teaches here, you will answer: 'Yes, I grant I have sinned.' 'Then God will punish you.' 'He will not.' 'But does not God's law say so?' 'I have nothing to do with that law.' 'Why not?' 'Because I have another law that strikes that law silent — freedom.' 'What freedom?' 'The freedom of Christ. Through Christ I am utterly freed from the law.' Therefore the law, which remains a law for the wicked, is to me liberty — and it binds the law that would condemn me. The law that would hold me captive is now itself bound and held captive by grace and freedom, which is now my law. And my law says to the accusing law: 'You shall not hold this man bound and captive, for he is mine. I will hold you in captivity and bind your hands so that you cannot harm him — for he now lives to Christ and is dead to you.'

To do this is to knock out the teeth of the law, to wrench away its sting and all its weapons, and to strip it of all its power. And yet the same law continues and remains in full force for the wicked and unbelievers — and for us too, insofar as we lack faith, it retains its edge and its teeth. But when I believe in Christ — even if sin is driving me to despair — resting on the freedom I have in Christ I confess that I have sinned. But my sin, which is a condemned sin, is in Christ, who is the condemning sin. And this condemning sin is stronger than the sin condemned — for it is justifying grace, righteousness, life, and salvation. So when I feel the terror of death, I say: 'You have nothing to do with me, O death — for I have another death that kills your death, and that killing death is stronger than the death that is killed.'

A person of faith, through faith alone in Christ, can therefore lift himself up and find such firm and solid comfort that he need not fear the devil, sin, death, or any evil. Though the devil attacks with all his might and tries to crush him with the world's most terrifying horrors, a believer holds on to hope even in the midst of it and says: 'Sir Devil, I do not fear your threats and terrors. There is one named Jesus Christ, in whom I believe. He has abolished the law, condemned sin, defeated death, and destroyed hell. He is your tormentor, O Satan — He has bound you and holds you captive, so that you can no longer harm me or anyone who believes in Him.' This faith the devil cannot overcome — it overcomes him. 'For this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?' (1 John 5:4-5).

Paul therefore, with intense passion and force of spirit, calls grace itself a law — even though it is, in truth, an immeasurable and priceless liberty of grace that we have in Christ Jesus. He gives this provocative name to the law as a comfort to us, to show us that the law's role has been fundamentally redefined: it is no longer alive and active but dead and condemned. And here — which is a delightful sight to see — he brings the law forward and displays it before us as a convicted criminal already sentenced to death. He shows it as a prisoner with both hands and feet shackled, all its power stripped away, unable to exercise its tyranny — unable to accuse and condemn any longer. With this glorious sight he makes the law contemptible to the conscience. Now the person who believes in Christ can boldly and with a holy pride triumph over the

law and say: 'I am a sinner — if you can do anything against me now, O law, do your worst.' The law has lost all its power to terrify the believer.

Since Christ has risen from the dead, why should He fear the grave? Since Peter has been freed from prison, why should he fear it? While the girl was on the brink of death, she might have feared her deathbed — but once raised to life, why should she fear it? In the same way, why should a Christian who possesses Christ by faith fear the law? He does feel the terror of the law — but he is not conquered by it. Resting in the freedom he has in Christ, he says: 'I hear you muttering, O law, threatening to accuse and condemn me. But this troubles me not at all. You are to me as the grave was to Christ. I see you shackled hand and foot — and my law has done this to you.' 'What law is that?' 'Freedom — called a law not because it binds me, but because it binds my law. The law of the Ten Commandments once bound me. But against that law I have another law: the law of grace. And this law of grace does not bind me — it sets me free. It is a law against that accusing and condemning law, binding it so that it can no longer harm me.' Against the death that binds me, I have another death — that is, life, which gives me life in Christ. This life frees me from the bonds of my death and binds death with the same bonds. So the death that once bound me is now bound itself, and the death that once killed me is now killed by death — that is, by life itself.

So Christ is called by the most comforting names: my law, my sin, my death — against the law, against sin, against death. And yet in reality He is nothing but pure freedom, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation. For this reason He became the law of the law, the sin of sin, the death of death — to redeem me from the curse of the

law, to justify me, and to give me life. While Christ is the law, He is also freedom; while He is sin, He is righteousness; while He is death, He is life. For by allowing the law to accuse Him, sin to condemn Him, and death to devour Him, He abolished the law, condemned sin, destroyed death, and justified and saved me. So Christ is the poison of the law, of sin, and of death — and the medicine by which we obtain freedom, righteousness, and eternal life.

This way of speaking, which belongs to Paul alone, is full of comfort. Likewise in Romans 7 he sets the law of the Spirit against the law of the members. Because this is such a striking and unexpected way of speaking, it enters the mind more easily and stays more firmly in memory. Moreover, when he says 'I through the law am dead to the law,' it rings more sweetly than if he had said 'I through freedom am dead to the law.' He sets before us a picture, as it were, of the law fighting against itself. As if he were saying: 'O law, if you would accuse me, terrify me, and bind me — I will set against you another law, another tormentor, that will accuse you, bind you, and triumph over you. Once you are bound and suppressed, I am at liberty.' Grace is therefore a law — not to me, since it does not bind me, but to my law, which it binds so completely that the law can no longer harm me.

Paul's aim throughout is to draw us entirely away from staring at the law, sin, death, and every evil, and to bring us to Christ — so that there we may behold this glorious battle: law fighting against law, that it may become freedom for me; sin fighting against sin, that it may become righteousness for me; death fighting against

death, that I may obtain life; Christ fighting against the devil, that I may be a child of God; and Christ destroying hell, that I may possess the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 19. So that I might live to God.

That is: so that I might live before God. You see then that there is no life unless you are outside the law — yes, unless you are utterly dead to the law, I mean in conscience. Yet in the meantime, as I have often said, as long as the body lives, the flesh must be disciplined by laws and pressed hard by their demands and penalties. But the inner person — not subject to the law but delivered and freed from it — is alive, righteous, and holy: not from himself, but in Christ, because he believes in Him, as follows.

Verse 20. I have been crucified with Christ.

He adds this to show that the law is a consumer of the law. Not only am I dead to the law through the law so that I may live to God, he says — I am also crucified with Christ. Christ is Lord over the law because He was crucified and died to the law. Therefore I too am Lord over the law, because I am crucified and dead to the law — crucified and dead with Christ. By what means? By grace and faith. Through this faith, now that I am crucified and dead to the law, the law loses all the power it once held over me — just as it has lost all power over Christ. Therefore just as Christ Himself was crucified to the law, sin, death, and the devil, so that they have no more power over Him — so also I, through faith, being crucified with Christ in spirit, am crucified and dead to the law, sin, death, and the devil, so that they have no more power over me but are themselves crucified and dead to me.

Paul is not speaking here about crucifying through imitation or example — that is, following Christ's example of suffering, which belongs to the flesh and of which Peter speaks in his first letter, chapter 2: 'Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example to follow in His steps' (1 Peter 2:21). He is speaking of that higher crucifying in which sin, the devil, and death are crucified in Christ — not in me. Christ Jesus accomplishes all of this Himself alone. But I, believing in Christ, am by faith crucified with Christ — so that all of these things are crucified and dead to me.

Verse 20. Yet I live.

I am not saying, Paul continues, that my death and crucifying mean I no longer live. Yes, I live — I am made alive by this very death and crucifying through which I die. Because I am delivered from the law, sin, and death, I now truly live. That crucifying and death — by which I am crucified and dead to the law, sin, death, and all evils — is to me resurrection and life. Christ crucifies the devil, kills death, condemns sin, and binds the law. And I, believing this, am delivered from the law, sin, death, and the devil. The law is therefore bound, dead, and crucified to me — and I am bound, dead, and crucified to it. Therefore by this very death and crucifying — that is, by this grace and freedom — I now live.

Here, as I said before, we must take note of Paul's manner of speaking. He says that we are dead and crucified to the law, when in reality the law itself is dead and crucified to us. He speaks this way intentionally, to make it sweeter and more comforting. For the law — which continues to live and reign in the whole world and which accuses and condemns all people — is crucified and dead only to those who believe in Christ. Therefore to them alone belongs this glory: that they are dead to sin, hell, death, and the devil.

Verse 20. Yet it is no longer I.

That is: not in my own person or in my own substance. Here Paul plainly shows how he lives, and teaches what true Christian righteousness is — the righteousness by which Christ lives in us, not a righteousness located in our own person. Therefore when we speak of Christian righteousness, we must completely set aside the person. Christ and my conscience must become one body, so that nothing remains before my eyes but Christ crucified and raised from the dead. But if I look only at myself and push Christ aside, I am finished. I immediately fall into this thought: 'Christ is in heaven and you are on earth — how will you reach Him? I will live a holy life and do what the law requires. That is how I will enter into life.' When I turn inward and consider what I am, what I should be, and what I owe, I lose sight of Christ, who is my righteousness and life. And once He is lost, there is no counsel or help remaining — only certain despair and destruction.

This is a universal human failure. Such is our misery: when temptation or death comes, we immediately set Christ aside and begin to review our own past life and what we have done. Unless we are raised again by faith at that moment, we will perish. We must therefore learn in such conflicts and terrors of conscience to forget ourselves — to set aside the law, our past life, and all our works, which do nothing but drive us to look inward — and to turn our eyes entirely to that bronze serpent, Christ Jesus crucified, and believe with certainty that He is our righteousness and life. We must not fear the threats and terrors of the law, sin, death, and God's judgment. For Christ, upon whom our eyes are fixed, in

whom we live and who lives in us, is Lord and conqueror of the law, sin, death, and all evils. In Him, certain and sure comfort is offered to us and victory is given.

Verse 20. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

When Paul says 'I live,' he speaks as it were from his own person. He immediately corrects himself: 'yet not I now.' That is: I no longer live in my own person — Christ lives in me. The person does live, but not in himself, nor for his own sake, nor by anything that is in him. But who is this 'I' of which he says 'yet not I'? This 'I' is the person who has the law and is bound to do its works — a person separate from Christ. This person Paul rejects. For as he stands separate from Christ, he belongs to death and hell. Therefore he says: 'Now not I, but Christ lives in me.' Christ is my form, my completion and perfection — adorning and beautifying my faith as color, clear light, or whiteness adorns and beautifies a wall. We are compelled to describe this with such illustrations because we cannot spiritually comprehend how closely Christ is joined and united to us — more intimately than color to a wall. Christ therefore — joined and united to me, dwelling in me — lives in me the very life that I now live. Indeed, Christ Himself is this life that I now live. Therefore Christ and I in this respect are one.

Now Christ living in me abolishes the law, condemns sin, and destroys death — for in His presence all these must inevitably fade away. Christ is everlasting peace, comfort, righteousness, and life — and before these, the terror of the law, distress of mind, sin, hell, and death must give way. Christ living and remaining in me takes away and swallows up all the evils that trouble and afflict me. This union — the union of Christ and me — is the reason I am freed

from the terror of the law and sin, separated from myself, and transferred to Christ and His kingdom: a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and eternal glory. Now, dwelling and remaining in Him — what evil can harm me?

Meanwhile the old self remains on the outside and is subject to the law. But in the matter of justification, Christ and I must be completely joined and united, so that He lives in me and I in Him. This is a wonderful thing to say. Because Christ lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation is in me is His — and yet all the same it is also mine, by that inseparable union through faith, by which Christ and I are made as it were one body in spirit. Since Christ lives in me, it follows that I must share in His grace, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation. And where that is the case, the law, sin, and death can have no place in me. Indeed the law is swallowed up by the law, sin by sin, and death by death. So Paul sets out to turn us away from looking at ourselves, the law, and works, and to plant true faith in Christ in us — so that in the matter of justification we think on nothing but grace, keeping it far removed from the law and works, which in this matter have no place.

Paul has a distinctive way of speaking — not the manner of ordinary people, but divine and heavenly — not used by the other Evangelists or apostles except for John, who occasionally speaks in a similar way. If Paul had not first used this language and set it out plainly, even the saints themselves would not have dared to use it. For it sounds very strange and almost absurd to say: 'I live, I do not live; I am dead, I am not dead; I am a sinner, I am not a sinner; I have the law, I do not have the law.' Yet this way of speaking is sweet and comforting to all who believe in Christ. When they

look at themselves, they have both the law and sin. But when they look to Christ, they are dead to the law and have no sin. Therefore, in the matter of justification, if you separate the person of Christ from your person, you are in the law, living under the law, and not in Christ. In that case you are condemned by the law and dead before God. For you have only the kind of faith that the Scholastics dream of — a faith furnished with love. I say this by way of illustration, for in truth no one was ever saved by such a faith. Everything the Scholastics have written about this kind of faith is nothing but empty speculation and pure deception by Satan. But let us grant there are people who have this faith — they are still not justified by it. For they have only a historical faith about Christ — which the devil and all the wicked also have.

Faith must therefore be taught purely — that you are so completely and intimately joined to Christ that He and you have become, as it were, one person. You can boldly say: 'I am now one with Christ — His righteousness, victory, and life are mine.' And Christ in turn can say: 'I am that sinner — his sins and his death are mine, because he is united to Me and I to him.' For by faith we are joined together so closely that we become one flesh and one bone (Ephesians 5:30) — members of His body, flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones. This faith binds Christ and me more closely together than a husband is bound to his wife. Faith is therefore not an idle quality. Its excellence is such that it completely exposes the foolish dreams of the Scholastics about their formed faith and counterfeit love, their merits, works, and worthiness. I would gladly say all of this more fully if I could.

We have now set out Paul's first argument: either Christ must necessarily be a minister of sin, or the law does not justify. After completing that argument he put himself forward as an example, saying he was dead to the old law through a new law. Now he answers two objections that might be raised against him. His first answer deals with the contemptuous claims of the proud and the stumbling of the weak. Whenever forgiveness of sins is freely preached, malicious people immediately slander it. As in Romans 3: 'Let us do evil so that good may come' (Romans 3:8). These people, as soon as they hear we are not justified by the law, immediately and maliciously conclude: 'Fine, then let us throw out the law altogether.' Or: 'If grace abounds where sin abounds, let us multiply sin so that we may become righteous and grace may abound all the more.' These are the malicious and arrogant spirits who deliberately slander the Scriptures and the words of the Holy Spirit — just as they slandered Paul in his own day, to their own confusion and condemnation, as 2 Peter 3 says.

There are also the weak — those who are not malicious but are genuinely troubled when they hear that the law and good works are not to be done as requirements for justification. These people need help. They need to learn how good works do not justify, and yet how and why they should be done. Good works should be done not as the cause of righteousness but as its fruit. When we are made righteous, we do them — not the other way around, seeking to become righteous through them. The tree produces the apple; the apple does not produce the tree.

When Paul said earlier 'I am dead,' the arrogant and malicious could easily seize on this and complain: 'What are you saying, Paul? You are dead? Then how are you speaking? How are you

writing?' The weak could also be unsettled and say: 'What are you, Paul? We can see you are alive and doing all the things that belong to this life.' His answer: I do indeed live, and yet it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. There are therefore two lives. The first is mine — natural life. The second is the life of another — the life of Christ in me. As for my natural life, I am dead, and I now live another life. I no longer live as Paul — Paul is dead. Who then is it that lives? The Christian. Paul, as he lives in himself, is wholly dead through the law. But as he lives in Christ — or rather as Christ lives in him — he lives by a different life. Christ speaks in him, lives in him, and carries out all the activities of life in him. This life does not come from the natural Paul but from the Christian and regenerate person. So you, malicious spirit — when I say I am dead, do not slander my words. And you who are weak — do not be offended, but make this distinction carefully. There are two lives: my natural life, and the life of another. By my own life I do not live — for if I did, the law would have dominion over me and hold me captive. To prevent it from holding me captive and in bondage, I am dead to it through another law. And this death secures for me the life of another — the life of Christ. This life is not mine by nature; it is given to me by Christ through faith.

The second answer addresses another objection. It might be said: 'What do you mean, Paul? You say you do not live by your own life or in your own flesh but in Christ? We see your flesh — we do not see Christ. Are you trying to deceive us with some trick, when we can plainly see you present in flesh, living as you did before and doing all things in this bodily life as everyone else does?' To this he answers.

Verse 20. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.

That is: I do live in the flesh — but this life, whatever it is, I count as no real life, for it is not truly life but only its shadow. Beneath it another lives — Christ, who is my true life, which you cannot see but only hear reported, while I feel it myself. 'You hear the sound of the wind but do not know where it comes from or where it goes' (John 3:8). In the same way, you see me speaking, eating, working, sleeping, and doing everything else — but you do not see my life. This life that I now live, I live in the flesh, but not through the flesh or according to the flesh — I live through faith and according to faith. Paul does not deny that he lives in the flesh, since he does everything that belongs to a natural person. He uses bodily things — food, drink, clothing, and the like — which is what it means to live in the flesh. But he says this is not his true life. Although he uses these things, he does not live through them as the world does — the world lives by the flesh and for the flesh, knowing and hoping for no other life.

'This life I now live in the flesh,' he says, 'whatever it may be, I live by faith in the Son of God.' The word I now speak in bodily form is not the word of flesh but of the Holy Spirit and of Christ. The sight that enters or goes out through my eyes does not proceed from flesh — that is, it is not governed by the flesh but by the Holy Spirit. So too my hearing comes not from the flesh, though it is in the flesh — it comes from the Holy Spirit. A Christian speaks nothing but pure, sober, and holy things that pertain to Christ, the glory of God, and the good of his neighbor. These things do not come from the flesh, are not done according to the flesh, and yet they are done in the flesh. For I cannot teach, write, pray, or give

thanks except with these physical instruments, which are necessary for doing such works — and yet these works do not proceed from the flesh but are given by God from above. In the same way I may look at a woman, but with a pure eye, without lust. This looking does not come from the flesh, though it is in the flesh — since the eyes are the physical instruments of sight — but the purity of that sight comes from heaven.

So a Christian uses the world and all created things in much the same way as an unbeliever. In clothing, eating, hearing, seeing, speaking, gestures, appearance, and all such outward things they look alike. Outwardly they appear to be the same — as Paul says of Christ: 'He was found in appearance as a man' (Philippians 2:8). Yet there is an enormous difference. I live in the flesh, yes — but I do not live from myself. What I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God. What I now speak flows from a different source than what you heard from me before. Before his conversion Paul used the same voice and tongue that he used afterward. But before, his voice and tongue were blasphemous, and he could speak nothing but blasphemies and abominations against Christ and His church. After his conversion he had the same flesh, the same voice, the same tongue as before — nothing changed outwardly. But his voice and tongue no longer uttered blasphemies. They uttered spiritual and heavenly words — thanksgiving and praise to God — which came from faith and the Holy Spirit. So I live in the flesh, but not from the flesh or according to the flesh — I live by faith in the Son of God.

From all of this we can see clearly where this spiritual life comes from — it does not come from ourselves but from another. The natural person cannot understand it at all, for he does not

know what kind of life this is. He hears the wind but does not know where it comes from or where it goes. He hears the spiritual person's voice, knows his face, his manner, and his conduct. But he cannot see where these actions — no longer wicked and blasphemous as before, but holy and godly — or these impulses and activities come from. For this life is in the heart by faith, where the flesh is put to death and Christ reigns with His Holy Spirit, who now sees, hears, speaks, works, suffers, and does all else in the believer — even though the flesh resists. In short: this is not the life of the flesh, though it is in the flesh. It is the life of Christ the Son of God, whom the Christian possesses by faith.

Verse 20. Who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Here you have the true means of justification, and a perfect example of the assurance of faith set before your eyes. The person who can say with Paul, from firm and constant faith: 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me' — that person is truly blessed. With these very words Paul takes away the entire righteousness of the law and works, as we will explain further on. But we must carefully weigh these words: 'The Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me.' It was not I who first loved the Son of God and gave myself up for Him — as the Scholastics dream, imagining that they love the Son of God and give themselves up for Him. They teach that a person by his own pure natural strength can do meritorious works before receiving grace, and can love God and Christ above all things. These people claim to act first, before God. They do what lies within them — as they like to say — keeping not only the commandments but going beyond them, doing works of supererogation and selling the surplus of their merits to lay people. They imagine they deliver them-

selves for Christ's sake and thereby save both themselves and others — turning Paul's words completely upside down and saying: 'We have loved Christ and given ourselves up for Him.' While these wicked people, puffed up with fleshly wisdom, imagine they are doing their part — loving God and offering themselves for Christ — what are they doing but abolishing the Gospel, mocking and denying Christ, blaspheming Him, spitting on Him, and trampling Him underfoot? They confess in words that He is Justifier and Savior, but in reality they strip from Him the power to justify and save, and give it instead to their own self-invented works, ceremonies, and devotions. This is to live in one's own righteousness and works, not in faith in the Son of God.

The true way to justification is therefore not to do what lies within you, as the Scholastics and school doctors teach — claiming that if a person does what lies within him, God will certainly give grace. Yet they soften this, saying the standard is not strict perfection: if we do works that would be approved by any decent person, that is enough, and grace will surely follow — because God, being good and just, must reward such good works. This gave rise to the saying: 'God will require of no man more than he can perform.' This is a fine saying, rightly applied in its proper place — namely, in the governing of civil affairs and households. In the kingdom of reason, if I carry out the duties of a magistrate or manage a household to the best of my ability, I am excused from what I cannot do. This civil kingdom has its proper limits, within which sayings like 'do what lies within you' and 'do as much as you are able' are appropriate. But the Scholastics apply these sayings to the spiritual kingdom — where a person can do nothing but sin, for he is sold under sin. In external matters, those that pertain to civil and

household affairs, he is not a slave but a lord and ruler. It was therefore wrong of them to apply to the church what properly belongs to civil and domestic government. The kingdom of human reason and the spiritual kingdom must be kept far apart.

They also say that while human nature is corrupt, the natural faculties of the mind are nevertheless sound and uncorrupted — a status they even extend to demons. On this basis they reason: if a person's natural faculties are sound and uncorrupted, then his understanding and will are sound and uncorrupted, and consequently all other natural faculties are pure and perfect. You need to understand this to hold firmly to the purity of the doctrine of faith. When they say that the natural faculties of a person are sound and uncorrupted, and then infer that a person can by himself fulfill the law and love God with all his heart — applying these natural faculties to the spiritual kingdom — I deny this conclusion. I distinguish between the natural and the spiritual faculties, which they confuse and mix together. I say that the spiritual faculties are not sound but corrupt — utterly quenched by sin in both people and demons — so that there is nothing left but a corrupted understanding and a will perpetually fighting against God's will, which can conceive of nothing but what is entirely against God. I do grant, however, that the natural faculties are uncorrupted. But which ones? The faculties by which a person — even one drowned in sin and iniquity, even a slave of Satan — still has the will, reason, and ability to carry out the duties of a magistrate, manage a household, steer a ship, build a house, and perform other works within the human domain. These have not been taken from him. We do not deny that these statements are true in the civil kingdom. But if you apply them to the spiritual kingdom, I reject them entirely — for there,

as I said, we are completely overwhelmed and drowned in sin. Whatever is in our will is evil; whatever is in our understanding is error. In spiritual matters, therefore, a person has nothing but darkness, error, ignorance, malice, and perversity of both will and understanding. How then could he do good, fulfill the law, and love God?

Therefore Paul says here that Christ moved first — not we. 'He,' Paul says, 'loved me and gave Himself up for me.' As if he were saying: He found in me no good will or right understanding. But this gracious Lord had mercy on me. He saw me to be nothing but wicked — straying, despising God, fleeing further and further from Him, and even rebelling against God, seized and led away as a captive of the devil. Out of His pure mercy — acting before my reason, my will, or my understanding could — He loved me. And He loved me in this way: He gave Himself up for me, so that I might be freed from the law, sin, the devil, and death.

These words — 'the Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me' — are like mighty thunder and lightning from heaven against the righteousness of the law and all its works. Such great and terrible wickedness, error, darkness, and ignorance lay in my will and understanding that it was impossible for me to be ransomed by any other means than by this immeasurable price. Why then do we boast of the soundness of human nature, of the rule of reason, of free will, of doing what lies within us? Why do I offer to God — who, as Moses says, is a consuming fire — my rotten stubble and straw, yes, my horrible sins, and then demand that He reward me with grace and eternal life for them? Here I learn that such wickedness lay lurking in my nature that the whole world

with all its creatures could not begin to balance God's just indignation against it — nothing less than the very Son of God Himself had to be given up for it.

But let us contemplate this price carefully, and behold this one delivered — Paul says — for me: the Son of God. He exceeds and surpasses all creatures beyond all comparison. What will you do when you hear the apostle say that so immeasurable a price was paid for you? Will you bring your monk's cowl, your shaved head, your chastity, your obedience, your poverty, your works, your merits? What will all of these count for? What will even the law of Moses avail? What will the works of all people and the suffering of all the martyrs accomplish for you? What is the obedience of all the holy angels compared to the Son of God — delivered in the most shameful manner, to the death of the cross, every drop of His precious blood poured out for your sins? If you could rightly grasp this incomparable price, you would count all ceremonies, vows, works, and merits — before grace and after — as accursed, and throw them all into hell. For it is a horrible blasphemy to imagine there is any work by which you might presume to pacify God, when nothing can pacify Him but this immeasurable price — the death and blood of the Son of God, of which a single drop is worth more than all created things in the world.

Verse 20. For me.

Who is this 'me'? Even I — a wretched and condemned sinner — so dearly loved by the Son of God that He gave Himself up for me. If I could have loved the Son of God through works or merits and so come to Him on my own, what need would there have been for Him to give Himself up for me? This shows how carelessly the papists handled — indeed, how completely they neglected — the

holy Scriptures and the doctrine of faith. If they had weighed even these words alone — that it was necessary for the Son of God to be given up for me — it would have been impossible for so many monstrous sects to have arisen among them. For faith would immediately have answered: 'Why are you choosing this way of life, this religious practice, this work? Are you doing this to please God, or to be justified by it? Do you not hear, poor soul, that the Son of God shed His blood for you?' True faith in Christ would easily have stood against all manner of sects.

Therefore I say — as I have said many times — that there is no remedy against sects and no power to resist them except this one article of Christian righteousness. If we lose this article, it is impossible to withstand any error or sect — as we see today in the fanatical Anabaptists and those like them, who, having departed from the article of justification, will never stop falling, erring, and leading others astray until they have reached the fullness of all wickedness. There is no doubt they will raise up countless sects and keep devising new works. But what are all these things — however impressive their outward appearance of holiness — compared to the death and blood of the Son of God, who gave Himself up for me? Consider carefully who this Son of God is, how glorious He is, how mighty He is. What are heaven and earth in comparison to Him? Let all the papists and all the founders of sects — yes, let the whole world take their side — be thrown into hell together with all their righteousness, works, and merits, rather than the truth of the Gospel be tainted and the glory of Christ perish. What do they mean by boasting so much of works and merits? If I — a wretched and condemned sinner — could have been redeemed by any other price, what need would there have been for the Son of God to be

given up for me? But because there was no other price anywhere in heaven or earth except Christ the Son of God, it was absolutely necessary that He be given up for me. And He did this out of immeasurable love — for Paul says: 'who loved me.'

Therefore these words — 'who loved me' — are full of faith. The person who can say this little word 'me' and apply it to himself with true and constant faith, as Paul did, will be a good debater with Paul against the law. For God gave up not sheep, not oxen, not gold or silver, but God Himself — entirely and completely — for me. For me, I say, a miserable and wretched sinner. Now therefore, knowing that the Son of God was given up to death for me, I take comfort and apply this benefit to myself. And this manner of applying it to oneself is the true power of faith.

These words — which are the pure preaching of grace and of true Christian righteousness — Paul sets against the righteousness of the law. As if he were saying: granted, the law is a heavenly doctrine with its own glory. But it did not love me, nor give itself up for me. On the contrary, it accuses me, terrifies me, and drives me to despair. But I now have another — one who has delivered me from the terrors of the law, from sin and death, and has brought me into freedom, the righteousness of God, and eternal life. His name is the Son of God. To Him be praise and glory forever.

Faith therefore, as I have said, embraces and encloses within itself Christ Jesus the Son of God, given up to death for us — as Paul teaches here. When Christ is grasped by faith, He gives us righteousness and life. Here Paul depicts most vividly the priesthood and offices of Christ: to pacify God, to intercede for sinners, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for their sins, to redeem, to instruct, and to comfort them. Let us learn to give a true definition of Christ

— not as the Scholastics and those who seek righteousness by their own works do, making Him a new lawgiver who has replaced the old law with a new one. To these people, Christ is nothing but an enforcer and a tyrant. Instead, let us define Him as Paul does here: the Son of God who, not for any merit or righteousness of ours, but out of His own free mercy, offered Himself as a sacrifice for us sinners, so that He might sanctify us forever.

Christ then is no Moses, no enforcer, no lawgiver. He is a giver of grace, a Savior, full of mercy — in short, He is nothing but infinite mercy and goodness, freely given and abundantly bestowed on us. This is how you should picture Christ in His true colors. If you allow yourself to picture Him any other way, when temptation and trouble come you will quickly fall. Yet as important as it is for Christians to define Christ rightly, it is also the hardest of all things to do. Even I, in this great light of the Gospel — having lived in it for so long — struggle greatly to hold on to the definition of Christ that Paul gives here. The teaching that Christ is a lawgiver has sunk so deep in me it is like oil in my bones. You who are young are much better off than those of us who are old in this regard. You have not been infected with these poisonous errors in which I was raised and drowned from my youth. At the very sound of Christ's name my heart would tremble and shake with fear, so convinced was I that He was a severe judge. It is therefore a double labor for me to correct this: first to forget, reject, and resist that old deep-rooted error that Christ is a lawgiver and judge — for it often returns and drags me back. Then to plant in my heart the new and true conviction that Christ is the Justifier and Savior. You who are young can learn to know Christ purely and sincerely with much less difficulty, if you will. Therefore if anyone feels burdened with

heaviness and anguish of heart, let him not attribute it to Christ — even if it comes under Christ's name — but to the devil, who often disguises himself as an angel of light under the appearance of Christ.

We must learn therefore to distinguish between Christ and a lawgiver — not only in words but in practice and in experience — so that when the devil comes under the guise of Christ, trying to trouble us in His name, we may recognize him as not Christ at all but as the devil himself. For when Christ truly comes, He is nothing but joy and sweetness to a trembling and broken heart, as Paul witnesses here — describing Him with the most tender and loving words: 'who loved me and gave Himself up for me.' Christ in truth is a lover of those who are in bitterness of soul, in sin, and in death — a lover who gave Himself up for them. He is also our High Priest — the Mediator between God and us wretched sinners. What could possibly be said more sweet or comforting to a troubled conscience? Now, if these things are true — as they are most certainly true, or else the Gospel is nothing but a fable — then we are not justified by the righteousness of the law, and far less by our own righteousness.

Read carefully and with great force the words 'me' and 'for me', and train yourself so that you firmly grasp and imprint this 'me' in your heart, applying it to yourself with steadfast faith. Do not doubt that you are among those to whom this 'me' belongs. Christ loved not only Peter and Paul and gave Himself up for them — the same grace contained in this 'me' extends to us just as much as to them. For just as we cannot deny that we are all sinners — constrained to confess that through Adam's sin we are all lost, made enemies of God, subject to His wrath and judgment, and guilty of

eternal death (as all terrified hearts feel and confess, and in fact feel it more than they should) — so also we cannot deny that Christ died for our sins to make us righteous. He did not die to justify the righteous, but the unrighteous — to make them children of God and heirs of all spiritual and heavenly gifts. Therefore when I feel and confess that I am a sinner because of Adam's transgression, why should I not say that I am made righteous through the righteousness of Christ — especially when I hear that He loved me and gave Himself up for me? This Paul believed with absolute certainty, and therefore he speaks these words with such intensity and confidence. May He grant us the same faith — at least in some measure — He who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

Verse 21. I do not nullify the grace of God.

Paul now prepares the way for the second main argument of this letter. Note carefully: to seek justification through the works of the law is to reject the grace of God. What sin, I ask, could be more abominable and terrible than rejecting the grace of God and refusing the righteousness that comes through Christ? It is already more than enough that we are wicked sinners who have broken all of God's commandments. But on top of that, we commit the most heinous sin of all — we contemptuously refuse the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins offered to us in Christ. This blasphemy is more horrible than words can express. There is no sin that Paul and the other apostles condemned more strongly than the contempt of grace and the denial of Christ — and yet there is no sin more common. This is why Paul above all others speaks so sharply against Antichrist: because he despises the grace of God and refuses the benefit of Christ our High Priest, who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. To deny Christ in this way — what is it but

to spit in His face, to trample Him underfoot, to put oneself in His place and say: 'I will justify you, I will save you — by Masses, pilgrimages, indulgences, merits, and the like'? We see then how arrogantly Antichrist has lifted himself up against God, placed himself in Christ's position, rejected the grace of God, and denied the faith. For this is his doctrine: 'Faith counts for nothing unless it is joined with works.' By this false and detestable teaching he has obscured, darkened, and utterly buried the benefit of Christ. In the place of Christ's grace and kingdom, he has established the doctrine of works and the kingdom of ceremonies. He has confirmed this with empty nonsense and foolish dreams, and by this means has torn the whole world from the hands of Christ — who alone ought to reign in the conscience — and has hurled it headlong into hell.

From this we can easily understand what it means to reject and refuse the grace of God: it means seeking righteousness through the law. Now who has ever heard that a person rejects grace by keeping the law? Do we sin by keeping the law? No. But we do despise grace when we keep the law for the purpose of being justified by it. The law is good, holy, and beneficial — and yet it does not justify. The person who keeps the law in order to be justified by it rejects grace, denies Christ, despises His sacrifice, and refuses to be saved by this immeasurable price. Instead he would satisfy for his sins through the righteousness of the law, or earn grace by his own righteousness. And in doing so he blasphemes and despises the grace of God. What a terrible thing it is to say that any person could be so perverse as to despise the grace and mercy of God! And yet the whole world does exactly this. Though it cannot bear to be

accused of it, and would prefer to think of itself as offering the highest service and honor to God. Now follows the second argument.

Verse 21. For if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

I remind you again that Paul is not speaking here only of the ceremonial law — which the papists always insist upon — but of the whole law. And Paul's words deserve careful attention. Did Christ actually suffer death, or not? And did He suffer in vain, or not? We must answer — unless we have lost all reason — that He truly suffered, and that He suffered not for Himself or in vain but for us. If He did not suffer in vain, it necessarily follows that righteousness does not come by the law.

Take then the whole law, and imagine that through merit by fittingness — or by works done before grace — you have made so much progress that you have received grace and the Spirit of God. This is impossible for human nature, but grant it for the sake of argument: that by doing what lies within you, you have obtained grace, been made righteous, and received the Holy Spirit through merit by fittingness. Then you have no need of Christ. He is useless to you, and His death has accomplished nothing.

Or take the law of the Ten Commandments, which contains the true religion and the highest worship of God — that is, faith, the fear of God, the love of God, and love of neighbor. Show me any person who has been justified by this. Even then it would remain true that Christ died in vain. For anyone who is justified by the law possesses within himself the power to obtain righteousness. By doing what lies within him he merits grace, the Holy Spirit is poured

into him, and he is now able to love God and neighbor. If this is granted, it necessarily follows that Christ died for nothing. What need does someone have of Christ, who loves Christ and gives himself for Christ — who can obtain grace before grace by merit of fittingness, and then do works by which, through merit of worthiness after grace, he can earn eternal life? In that case, push Christ aside with all His benefits, for He is utterly unnecessary. Why was He born? Why was He crucified? Why did He suffer? Why was He made my High Priest, loving me and giving Himself as an immeasurable sacrifice for me? All for nothing — to no purpose at all — if righteousness comes by no other means than what the papists teach. For on their terms, I find righteousness only in myself or in the law, without grace and without Christ.

Should this horrible blasphemy be tolerated or ignored — that the divine majesty, who did not spare His own beloved Son but gave Him up to death for us all, did not do this seriously and in earnest but as a kind of game? Before I would accept such a blasphemy, I would sooner that the holiness of all the papists and merit-mongers — indeed all the saints and holy angels — be cast to the bottom of hell and condemned with the devil. My eyes will look to nothing else but this immeasurable price: my Lord and Savior Christ. He must be such a treasure to me that everything else is rubbish in comparison. He must be such a light to me that when I have laid hold of Him by faith, I no longer notice whether there is any law, any sin, any righteousness or unrighteousness left in the world. For what is everything in heaven or earth compared to the Son of God, Christ Jesus my Lord and Savior, who loved me and gave Himself up for me?

To reject the grace of God, therefore, is a terrible sin — one that reigns throughout the entire world, and one of which all who seek righteousness by their own works are guilty. For in seeking to be justified by their own works, merits, or the law, they reject the grace of God and Christ, as I have said. The pope has been the primary author of all these abominations. He has not only defaced and trampled the Gospel of Christ underfoot but has also flooded the world with his accursed traditions. His bulls and indulgences are sufficient evidence of this — granting absolution not to those who believe, but to those who are contrite, make confession to a priest, and contribute financially to the upkeep of his pomp and his traditions. And yet, even in this great light of the Gospel, the blind and stubborn papists continue in their damnable foolish dreams — saying that the natural faculties remain sound and uncorrupted, and that people can prepare themselves for grace or earn it by their own works and merits. So far from acknowledging their error and wickedness, they continue to defend it stubbornly, even against their own conscience.

But we steadfastly affirm with Paul — for we will not reject the grace of God — that either Christ died in vain, or the law does not justify. Christ did not die in vain. Therefore the law does not justify. Christ the Son of God has justified us by His own free grace and mercy. Therefore the law could not justify us — if it could, Christ would have acted unwisely in giving Himself up for our sins so that we might be justified. We conclude therefore that we are justified neither by our own works and merits — before grace or after — nor by the law.

Now, if my salvation cost Christ such an immeasurable price — if He was constrained to die for my sins — then all my works and all the righteousness of the law are worth nothing in comparison. How can I buy for a penny what cost many thousands in gold? The law — to say nothing of other things of far lesser value — with all its works and righteousness, is like a penny compared to Christ, who by His death destroyed my death and purchased righteousness and eternal life. Should I then despise and reject this incomparable price, and through the law or through the works and merits of people — worthless dross and rubbish, as Paul himself calls them when compared to Christ — go searching for the righteousness that Christ has already freely given me out of pure love? Righteousness that cost Him such a price that He was constrained to give Himself, even His own blood, for me? The whole world does exactly this, as I have said — and especially those who would be counted more holy and religious than others. By this they openly testify that Christ died in vain, however much they confess the opposite with their lips. This is the most horrible blasphemy against the Son of God — spitting in His face, trampling Him underfoot, counting the blood of the covenant as a common thing, and utterly despising the Spirit of grace.

Paul in this discussion of righteousness has no civil matter in view — he is not speaking of civil righteousness, which God nevertheless approves and requires, and for which He rewards accordingly, and which reason is to some degree capable of producing. Rather, he is speaking of the righteousness that avails before God — the righteousness by which we are delivered from the law, sin, death, and all evils, and made partakers of grace, righteousness,

and eternal life. By this righteousness we become lords of heaven and earth and all creation. Neither human law nor the law of God can produce this righteousness.

The law was given alongside and above reason as a light and an aid to humanity — to show what should and should not be done. And yet a person with all his strength and reason — even with this great heavenly gift, the law — cannot be justified. If the greatest thing in the world — the law, which like a brilliant sun is joined to the dim light of human reason to illuminate and direct it — cannot justify, then what can reason accomplish without the law? Nothing — except what the pope with his dreaming Scholastics and his whole establishment has done: obscured even the light of the first commandment with their own traditions. Not one of them can rightly understand a single syllable of the law — every one of them walks in the pure darkness of human reason. And this error is far more deadly and destructive than the one that comes from the teaching of works and law.

These words, then, are powerful and full of force: 'If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing' (Galatians 2:21). Paul says nothing here about the greatness of human strength, reason, or wisdom — and in fact, the greater these are, the more easily they deceive a person. He simply says, without qualification: if righteousness is by the law, then Christ died for nothing. This means that reason — even when it is enlightened, aided, and directed by the law, yes even by God's own law — is so incapable of attaining righteousness that it actually pulls a person away from righteousness and leads him to reject Christ. Set the death of Christ plainly against all laws, and know nothing with Paul except Jesus Christ crucified. Accept no light from reason,

from the law, or from anything else — only from Christ alone. Then you will be truly learned, righteous, and holy, and you will receive the Holy Spirit, who will keep you in the purity of the word and of faith. But set Christ aside, and everything else — whatever it may be — is worthless and empty.

Here again we see what a fine description Paul gives to the righteousness of the law and of human merit: he calls it a contempt and rejection of the grace of God, and an abolishing of the death of Christ. Paul was not a trained rhetorician — and yet see what material he gives to anyone who wants to speak with force and skill. What eloquence can adequately express these words: 'to reject grace' — 'the grace of God' — and 'Christ died in vain'? The horror of these phrases is so immense that all the eloquence in the world cannot fully capture it. To say that any person dies for nothing is a sad thing; but to say that Christ died for nothing is to erase Him entirely and make Him nothing at all. Anyone who wants to speak powerfully has more than enough material here — to describe how horrible and blasphemous it is to set up the righteousness of the law and of works. What could be more blasphemous and terrible than to make the death of Christ worthless? And what else are those doing who keep the law in order to be justified by it? To make the death of Christ worthless is also to make His resurrection, His victory, His glory, His kingdom, heaven, earth, God Himself, the majesty of God — everything — worthless and void.

This thundering and lightning from heaven against the righteousness of the law and human merit should terrify us and make us abhor it. And here, struck by this thunderbolt, fall down all the monastic orders with their entire company of superstitious religion. Who would not detest his own vows, his monk's robe, his

shaved head, all human traditions — yes, even the law of Moses — if he understood that by trusting in these things he rejects the grace of God and makes the death of Christ worthless? The world hears this and does not believe it is true. It assumes that such horrible wickedness could not possibly enter into any person's heart — that someone would reject the grace of God and treat the death of Christ as nothing. And yet this sin is common everywhere. For whoever seeks righteousness apart from Christ — whether through works, merits, satisfactions, sufferings, or the law — rejects the grace of God and despises the death of Christ, no matter what he may profess with his lips.

The Third Chapter

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Verse 1. O foolish Galatians.

Paul here shows his apostolic care and passionate zeal for the church — so that in the midst of arguing and refuting error, he sometimes mixes in gentle encouragement and sometimes rebukes sharply, following his own instruction to Timothy: 'Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort' (2 Timothy 4). An inattentive reader might think Paul has no order or method in his teaching. As far as rhetorical technique goes, he follows none; but in terms of the Spirit's leading, his approach has an excellent order.

Paul has now sufficiently proven and confirmed with two strong arguments that Christian righteousness comes not by keeping the law but by faith in Christ — and he has refuted the teaching of the false apostles. At this point in his argument he turns directly to the Galatians and rebukes them: 'O you foolish Galatians' and so on. It is as if he were saying: How did this happen to you, O miserable Galatians? I taught you the truth of the Gospel with the greatest care and diligence, and you received it from me with fervent zeal and great eagerness. How then have you fallen away from it so quickly? Who has bewitched you?

Paul's rebuke of the Galatians seems sharp — calling them fools, bewitched, and disobedient to the truth. Whether he does this out of zeal or out of compassion, I will not argue here; both may well be true. A worldly person might read this as insult rather than godly correction. But did Paul set a bad example, or was he being spiteful toward the churches of Galatia by calling them foolish and bewitched? No, not at all. An apostle, pastor, or preacher may sharply correct the people entrusted to his care, acting out of Christian zeal — and such rebukes are fatherly and godly. Parents correct their children sharply out of fatherly and motherly love — correction the children would not accept from anyone else. A teacher sometimes becomes angry with a student, rebukes him, and disciplines him — and the student accepts it from his teacher in a way he would not accept from a peer. A magistrate likewise grows angry, rebukes, and punishes those under his authority. This kind of discipline is not only good but absolutely necessary — without it, nothing can be done well. If the magistrate, the minister, the father, or the mother refuses to rebuke when it is called for, they are useless and will never fulfill their office rightly.

Sharp rebukes and direct words are therefore as necessary in every area of life as any other virtue. But this kind of anger must be kept under control — it must not come from envy or malice, but only from fatherly love and Christian zeal. It must not be childish or vindictive, seeking revenge, but aimed only at correcting the fault — just as a father corrects his child not out of a desire for revenge but so that the child may become better. These kinds of anger are good and are called in Scripture 'jealousies' or 'zeals.'

When I correct my brother, my child, my student, or my subject in this way, I am not seeking their destruction but their benefit and welfare.

Paul's rebuke of the Galatians, then, comes either from passionate zeal — not to destroy them but to bring them back to the right path and restore them — or from sorrow and compassion, like a pained complaint that the Galatians have been so miserably deceived. It is as if he were saying: I am grieved and ashamed to hear of your wretched situation and what you have done. In the same way, we also rebuke those who are in a miserable state — not to crush them or shame them for their misery, but out of compassion, seeking their restoration. I say this so that no one can accuse Paul of railing against the churches contrary to the rule of the Gospel.

In the same way, Christ rebuked the Pharisees, calling them serpents, a brood of vipers, and children of the devil. But these are the rebukes of the Holy Spirit. They are fatherly and motherly — like the correction of a faithful friend, as Proverbs says: 'Better are the wounds of a friend than the kisses of an enemy.' So the same rebuke coming from a father's mouth can be a great benefit, while the very same words from an enemy's mouth are a spiteful insult. When two people do the same thing, in one it is praiseworthy and in the other it is the opposite. When Christ and Paul rebuke, it is done with exceptional virtue and benefit; but when a private person does the same, it can easily become a serious fault. Therefore the same words in Paul's mouth are a great virtue and a genuine benefit, while in another person's mouth they could be a shameful insult.

There is great force in Paul's choice of the word 'Galatians' here. He does not call them 'brothers' as he usually does elsewhere — he addresses them by the name of their nation. It seems that foolishness was a well-known characteristic of that people, just as the Cretans were known for lying. It is as if he were saying: You are living up to your name — you are foolish Galatians indeed, and you prove it right now in this matter of the Gospel, where above all things you should have shown wisdom. Instead, you are still following your old nature and showing that you have not changed at all. In this way Paul's correction points them back to their own corrupt nature.

This passage also reminds us that even in Christian churches, certain natural flaws remain in people according to the flesh. Grace does not so completely transform believers that they instantly become new creatures, perfect in everything — certain traces of their old, natural corruption remain. For example, a person who by temperament is prone to anger, when he is converted to Christ, is softened by grace — the Holy Spirit shapes his heart so that he becomes gentler and more patient — but this natural tendency is not entirely removed from his flesh. Likewise, people who are by nature stubborn and strong-willed, even after conversion, cannot fully shake that stubbornness. This is why the same holy Scriptures, containing the same truth, are handled differently by different personalities. One teacher is mild and gentle; another is more forceful and direct. In this way the Spirit of God, poured into different vessels, does not instantly eliminate the flaws of nature — but gradually, throughout this life, He purges the sin that is rooted not only in the Galatians but in all people of every nation.

Even though the Galatians had been enlightened, had believed, and had received the Holy Spirit through the preaching of faith, this remaining flaw — this foolishness — along with their original corruption, was still in them, and it later easily flared up into outright false doctrine. Let no one trust so much in himself as to think that once he has received grace, he has been completely purged of his old tendencies. Many things are certainly purged in us — most importantly, the head of the serpent: that is, unbelief and ignorance of God has been cut off and crushed. But the residue and traces of sin remain in us still. No one should presume that once he has received faith he is immediately and completely changed into a new person. In practice, he will carry some of his old tendencies with him, however good and mature a Christian he may be. We are not yet dead — we still live in the flesh, which, because it is not yet fully renewed, continually fights against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7). Paul says, 'I am carnal, sold under sin. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind.' The natural flaws that were in us before we received faith remain in us after we receive faith — except that now they are brought under the Spirit's control, which holds the upper hand and keeps them from ruling over us, though not without great struggle. This glory belongs to Christ alone, and this title is His: that He is pure and without blemish (1 Peter 2) — 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.'

Verse 1. Who has bewitched you, that you should not believe the truth?

Here we have another description of this impressive righteousness of the law and of human effort — namely, that it leads us to despise the truth, bewitching us so completely that we refuse to

obey the truth and instead resist it.

Of the Bodily and Spiritual Witchcraft

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Paul calls the Galatians foolish and bewitched, comparing them to children — those whom witches, sorcerers, and enchanters are in the habit of charming through their spells and the illusions of the devil. Later in the fifth chapter he lists sorcery among the works of the flesh — a kind of witchcraft — making it clear that such things are real and that they happen. Nor can it be denied that the devil is truly alive and actively at work throughout the whole world. Witchcraft and sorcery are the devil's work — and through them he not only harms people but, with God's permission, sometimes destroys them. Beyond this, we are all subject to the devil in body and in possessions. We are strangers in this world, of which he is the ruler and god. The bread we eat, the drink we drink, the clothes we wear, and the very air we breathe while living in this body — all of it falls under his dominion.

But the devil does not only bewitch people in this obvious, physical way — he also does it in a far more subtle and dangerous manner, and he is a remarkably skilled craftsman at this. This is why Paul draws a parallel between the charming of the physical senses and the bewitching of the spirit. Through this spiritual

witchcraft, that ancient serpent does not deceive the senses but the mind — implanting false and wicked opinions that those who are deceived take to be true and genuinely godly. The malice of this sorcerer is so great, and his desire to harm so intense, that he deceives not only careless and proud spirits with his enchantments, but also those who profess true Christianity and are sincere in their faith. To speak honestly about myself: he sometimes attacks me so powerfully and presses me down with such heavy thoughts that he completely hides my Savior Christ from me and nearly takes Him out of my sight altogether. In short, none of us is free from being bewitched by false persuasions at some point — that is, there is not one of us who does not sometimes fear, trust, or rejoice in the wrong things, or who does not at times think wrongly about God, about Christ, about faith, about his calling, or about the Christian life.

We must therefore learn to recognize the subtle tricks of this sorcerer, so that he does not find us sleeping and unprepared and deceive us with his enchantments. It is true that his sorcery cannot harm our ministry; yet he is present with us in spirit. Day and night he prowls about seeking to devour each one of us individually, and unless he finds us sober and armed with spiritual weapons — that is, with the word of God and faith — he will devour us.

This is why he so often stirs up fresh battles against us. And in fact it is very good for us that he attacks us and puts us to work against his subtle strategies — because through this our teaching is confirmed and our faith is strengthened and increased. Many times we have been knocked down — and still are knocked down in this conflict — yet we do not perish, for Christ has always triumphed and continues to triumph through us. We therefore hold a

confident hope that through Jesus Christ we will win the victory over the devil. This hope produces firm comfort in us, so that in the midst of temptation we take courage and say: 'Look, Satan has attacked us before with his false illusions and provoked us to unbelief, contempt of God, and despair — and yet he did not prevail, and he will not prevail in the future.' He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Christ is stronger; He has overcome that strong enemy in us and does overcome him still, and He will overcome him forever. Nevertheless, the devil sometimes overcomes us in the flesh, so that we may have experience of a stronger power working against that strong one, and may say with Paul: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'

Let no one think that only the Galatians were bewitched by the devil — let every person recognize that he himself could be, and may yet be, bewitched by him. None of us is strong enough to resist him on his own, especially if he tries to do so by his own strength. Job was an upright and righteous man who feared God, and there was no one like him on earth. But how much power did he have against the devil when God withdrew His protecting hand? Did not this holy man fall terribly? This enchanter was not only powerful against the Galatians — he is constantly at work, seeking to deceive, if not everyone, then as many as he can with his illusions and false persuasions, for he is a liar and the father of lies. By this subtle practice he has bewitched — as I have said — these frantic spirits, ruling in them and making them so stubborn and hardhearted that no anvil is harder.

Verse 1. Who has bewitched you?

Here Paul excuses the Galatians and places the blame on the false apostles. It is as if he were saying: I can see that you have not fallen through stubbornness or malice — but the devil has sent his children, the deceiving false apostles, among you. They have so bewitched you with their teaching that righteousness comes through the law, that you now think about Christ differently than you did when you first heard the Gospel from me. But we are working — both through preaching and through writing to you — to break the spell that the false apostles have cast, and to set free those who are caught in it.

Today we are doing the same work — through the word of God we labor against the fantastical opinions of the Anabaptists, trying to set free those who are caught in them and draw them back to the pure teaching of faith, and to hold them there. And this labor of ours is not entirely in vain. We have brought back many whom they had bewitched and rescued them from their snares. Even so, there are those who refuse to be taught — especially the leading sorcerers and originators of this error. They will not listen to reason or accept Scripture; instead they abuse and distort the Scripture, evading every passage brought against them with false interpretations and ideas that are directly contrary to the Scripture itself. This is a clear sign that they are bewitched by the devil. Our warnings do nothing to improve them — they only become more hardened and more stubborn than before. I could never have believed — had I not experienced it firsthand — that the devil's power is so great that he can make a lie appear so much like the truth. What is even more terrible: when he sets out to crush a troubled conscience under overwhelming despair, he can so skillfully and convincingly disguise himself as Christ that the poor tempted and

afflicted soul cannot detect the difference. Through this, many simple and ignorant people are deceived and driven to despair, and some even destroy themselves. They are so bewitched by the devil that they believe with absolute certainty that they are being tempted and accused not by the devil but by Christ Himself.

Something like this happened recently to that miserable man, Doctor Kraus of Hal, who said: 'I have denied Christ, and therefore He now stands before His Father accusing me.' He was so blinded by the devil's illusion that he had fixed this idea in his mind so firmly that no encouragement, no comfort, and no promise of God could move him from it — and so he despaired and destroyed himself miserably. This was a pure lie, a bewitching of the devil, and a completely false idea of a Christ the Scripture does not know. For Scripture presents Christ not as a judge, a tempter, or an accuser, but as a reconciler, a mediator, a comforter, and a throne of grace.

But the poor man, deceived by the devil, could not see this at the time — and so against all of Scripture he became convinced of what seemed to him an undoubted truth: 'Christ is accusing you before His Father; He stands not for you but against you; therefore you are condemned.' This temptation did not come from a human being but from the devil, who as an enchanter pressed this thought powerfully into the heart of the one being tempted. To those of us who are led and taught by another Spirit, it is an obvious and accursed lie — a plain bewitching of the devil. But to those who are bewitched in this way, it feels like the most certain truth imaginable.

Since the devil is able to stamp such an obvious lie into our hearts — so convincingly that we would swear a thousand times it was an undoubted truth — we must not be proud but must walk in

fear and humility, calling on the Lord Jesus that we not be led into temptation. Worldly and careless people, who after hearing the Gospel once or twice imagine they have received a full measure of God's Spirit, eventually fall in just this way — because they do not fear God or give Him thanks, but convince themselves that they are capable not only of holding and defending the true teaching but of standing against the devil in any attack, however severe. Such people are ready instruments for the devil to bewitch and throw down into despair.

On the other hand, do not say to yourself: 'I am perfect; I cannot fall.' Instead, humble yourself and be watchful — if you are standing today, you may be overthrown tomorrow. I myself — though I am a doctor of theology and have preached Christ and fought against the devil in his false teachers for a long time — still find from experience what a struggle it is to hold fast to Christ and not lose Him. I cannot shake Satan off as I would like to, nor can I lay hold of Christ as clearly as the Scriptures present Him — for the devil often places a false Christ before my eyes. But thanks be to God who keeps us in the word, in faith, and in prayer, so that we may walk before Him in humility and fear, and not presume on our own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, but trust in the power of Christ — who is strong when we are weak, and who through us weak and feeble creatures always overcomes and triumphs. To Him be glory forever.

This bewitching and sorcery, then, is nothing other than a plain illusion of the devil — pressing a false opinion of Christ, or against Christ, into the heart. The person who is trapped in this illusion is bewitched. Those who hold the opinion that they are justified by the works of the law or the traditions of men are be-

witched, because this opinion is against faith and against Christ. Paul uses the word 'bewitching' to show his contempt for the false apostles, who pushed the teaching of the law and works so aggressively. It is as if he were saying: What a devilish bewitching is this! Just as the physical senses are corrupted by bodily witchcraft, so are the minds of people corrupted by this spiritual witchcraft.

Verse 1. That you should not obey the truth?

At first the Galatians gladly heard and obeyed the truth. So when Paul asks 'Who has bewitched you?' he is showing that they were bewitched by the false apostles and had fallen away from the truth they had previously embraced. It is an even sharper and stronger statement when he says they do not believe the truth. By these words he indicates that they have been bewitched, and that he wants to deliver them from this witchery — yet they will not acknowledge or receive this help. It is certain that he did not bring all of them back from the error of the false apostles to the truth — many of them remained bewitched. This is why he uses such sharp and forceful words: 'Who has bewitched you?' It is as if he were saying: You are so deluded and bewitched that you can no longer obey the truth. I fear that many of you are utterly lost and have fallen away so far that you will never return to the truth.

Here we have yet another glowing description of the law and human righteousness — that it so bewitches people they cannot obey the truth. The apostles and the church fathers often spoke of this. There is 'a sin that leads to death, for which I say you should not pray' (1 John 5). And again: 'It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age — if they then fall

away — to be restored again to repentance' (Hebrews 6). At first these words sound as if some Novatian were speaking them. But the apostles were compelled to speak this way because of the heretics — and yet they did not thereby deny that those who had fallen could return again to fellowship with the faithful. We must speak the same way today regarding the leaders and promoters of errors and sects — that such people will never return to the truth. There are some, however, who do return: those who are not yet deeply bewitched or firmly locked in the delusion. But the ringleaders and originators of this sorcery never return. To them we may rightly apply the very title Paul gives here — that they cannot bear to hear the truth but are always working to resist it.

Verse 1. To whom Jesus Christ was previously portrayed before your eyes.

It was a sharp thing to say that they were so bewitched they could not obey the truth — but it is sharper still when Paul adds that Christ was displayed so vividly before them that they could almost touch Him with their hands, and yet they still would not obey the truth. With this, Paul convicts them by their own experience. It is as if he were saying: You are so bewitched and deceived by the devilish opinions of the false apostles that you will no longer obey the truth — and yet I labored with great diligence to set Christ plainly before your eyes, and all of it has profited you nothing.

In these words Paul refers back to the earlier arguments he had made — that those who seek to be justified by the law make Christ a minister of sin, that they reject the grace of God, and that to them Christ died for nothing. He had pressed these arguments with even greater force and detail when he was with them in person, like a painter portraying Christ Jesus before their very eyes.

Now, writing to them from a distance, he reminds them of the same things: 'To whom Jesus Christ was portrayed before your eyes.' It is as if he were saying: No painter with his colors could ever have portrayed Christ to you as vividly as I painted Him through my preaching — and yet you remain miserably bewitched.

Verse 1. And was crucified among you.

What did I portray? Christ Himself. And how was this done? In this way: that He was crucified in you, or among you. Paul uses very harsh and forceful words here. Earlier he said they were seeking righteousness by the law, rejecting the grace of God, and making Christ's death meaningless to themselves. Now he adds something even more severe: that they are crucifying Christ, who had previously lived and reigned in them. It is as if he were saying: You have not only rejected the grace of God and made Christ's death worthless to yourselves — you are now crucifying Him most shamefully among yourselves. He speaks the same way in Hebrews 6: 'crucifying to themselves again the Son of God and putting Him to open shame.'

Anyone who hears the words 'monk,' 'shaved head,' 'cowl,' and 'monastic rule' — however much the papists worship these things and boast of them as perfect religion and holiness (as I and others once judged them, before God revealed His Gospel to us, for we were raised in human traditions that darkened Christ and made Him utterly useless to us) — should be filled with alarm when he hears Paul say that even those who seek to be justified by God's own law are not only deniers and murderers of Christ but are actually crucifying Him again in the most wicked way. Now if those who seek to be justified by the righteousness of God's law and its

works are crucifiers of Christ, what shall we say about those who seek salvation and eternal life through the dregs and filthy rubbish of human righteousness and the teachings of demons?

But who could ever have believed or imagined that becoming a 'religious person' — as they call it — that is, becoming a Mass-priest, a monk, a friar, or a nun, was so horrible and abominable a sin? Certainly no one suspected it. Indeed the monks themselves say that entering the monastery is a second baptism. And yet what could be more horrible than that the kingdom of the papists is a kingdom of those who spite and spit in the face of Christ the Son of God and crucify Him again? For they do crucify Him afresh — Him who was once crucified and rose again — both in themselves, in the church, and in the hearts of the faithful. With their contemptuous attacks, slanders, and insults they spit on Him; with their wicked opinions they wound and pierce Him so that He dies miserably in them. And in His place they have erected a glorious witchcraft — a spell so powerful that people are miserably deceived and cannot recognize Christ as their justifier, their reconciler, and their Savior, but instead see Him as a minister of sin, their accuser, their judge, and their destroyer — someone who must be appeased by nothing less than our own works and merits.

Out of this opinion grew the most poisonous and destructive doctrine in all of the papacy, which goes like this: 'If you want to serve God, you must merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and you must also help others attain salvation. You must enter a monastery and vow obedience, chastity, poverty, and so on.' Monks, friars, and the rest of that religious company, puffed up with this view of their own holiness, imagined that they alone lived in a state of perfection, while ordinary Christians lived only a com-

mon life — since they performed no extraordinary works beyond what they were obligated to do; that is, they did not vow and keep chastity, poverty, and obedience. Ordinary believers were merely baptized and kept the Ten Commandments. But the monks — in addition to all they shared with other Christians — also performed works of supererogation and followed the counsels of Christ. Therefore they expected to earn merit and a place in heaven among the leading saints, far above the common run of Christians.

This was without doubt a horrible illusion of the devil, by which he had bewitched nearly the entire world. The more holy a person wanted to appear, the more deeply he was snared by this witchery — that is, by that poisonous confidence in his own righteousness. This was the very reason we could not recognize that Jesus Christ was our Mediator and Savior: instead we thought of Him as a severe judge who had to be appeased by our own works. That was nothing other than the most horrible blasphemy against Christ — and as Paul said earlier, it meant rejecting the grace of God, making the death of Christ of no effect, and not only killing Him but crucifying Him again most shamefully. This is the true meaning of what Christ cites from Daniel: 'the abomination stands in the holy place.' Therefore every monk, every religious person, every person seeking forgiveness of sins and righteousness through their own works or their own suffering is a crucifier of the Christ who now lives and reigns — not in Christ's own physical person, but in their own heart and in the hearts of others. And whoever enters a monastery with the intention of being justified by keeping its rule and way of life is entering a den of thieves — a place where Christ is crucified again.

Paul therefore uses very severe and harsh words here in order to alarm the Galatians and call them back from the teaching of the false apostles. It is as if he were saying: Consider carefully what you have done. You have crucified Christ again — and I am setting this before your eyes so plainly that you can see it and almost touch it with your hands — because you are seeking to be justified by the law. But if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ is merely a minister of sin and His death accomplishes nothing. And if that is true, it necessarily follows that Christ is being crucified again in you.

It is not without purpose that Paul adds the phrase 'in you' or 'among you.' Christ is no longer crucified or dying in His own person, as Romans 6 makes clear — but He dies in us when we reject true teaching, grace, faith, and free forgiveness of sins, and instead seek to be justified by our own works or by the works commanded in the law. That is where Christ is crucified in us again. Now this false and wicked assumption — that righteousness comes through the law and works — is nothing other, as I have explained at greater length earlier, than the illusion of the devil. By it, people are so bewitched that they cannot in any way acknowledge the benefit of Christ. Indeed, all their life long they can do nothing other than deny the Lord who bought them and in whose name they were baptized — and crucify Him again in themselves. Therefore, anyone who fears God and has a sincere heart toward Christ and His Gospel, let him flee quickly out of this Babylon and tremble at the very name of the papacy. The impiety and abomination of it is so horrible that no human words can express it — it can only be seen with spiritual eyes.

Paul presses these two arguments vigorously into the minds of the Galatians: first, that they are so bewitched by the devil that they cannot obey the truth, even though it has been set plainly before their eyes; and second, that they are crucifying Christ again within themselves. These seem like simple and unadorned words, without any grand rhetoric — but in reality they are so powerful that they surpass all human eloquence. It cannot be grasped except by the Spirit how great an offense it is to seek to be justified by the righteousness of the law or by human merit. For as Paul says here, it is nothing other than being bewitched by the devil, being disobedient to the truth, and crucifying Christ again. Are these not impressive commendations of the righteousness of the law and of human effort?

The apostle is moved with great zeal here, and with sharp words he attacks and condemns the presumption of our own righteousness built on keeping God's law — charging it with the offense of crucifying the Son of God again. Since it is so dangerous a thing, it cannot be condemned sharply enough — for from it follows a fall no less devastating than the fall of Lucifer, and a loss that can never be recovered. This is why Paul uses such severe and forceful language, sparing not even the law of God itself — speaking so forcefully against it that he seems to be rejecting and condemning it entirely. He does this out of necessity, for otherwise he could not withstand the false apostles or defend the righteousness of faith against them. Even though the law is holy, just, and good, it puts on the mask of a hypocrite the moment a person uses it to seek justification by works. And now Paul presses them with an argument drawn from their own experience — one they cannot deny.

Verse 2. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Paul speaks these words with a certain indignation and contempt for the false apostles. 'If I had nothing else against you but your own experience,' he says, 'that would be enough.' It is as if he were saying: Very well, answer me then — I who am your student (for you have so suddenly become doctors that you are now my masters and teachers): Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law, or by the preaching of the Gospel? With this argument he so thoroughly silences them that they have nothing to say in reply. Their own experience is entirely against them: they had received the Holy Spirit not through the works of the law but through the preaching of the Gospel.

Again I must point out that Paul is not speaking only of the ceremonial law but of the whole law. He bases his argument on a complete and sufficient division. If he were speaking only of the ceremonial law, the division would be incomplete. This is a two-horned argument with two options, one of which must be true and the other false: either you received the Holy Spirit through the law, or through hearing with faith. If it was by the law, then it was not by the hearing of faith. If it was by the hearing of faith, then it was not by the law. There is no middle ground between these two. Everything that is not the Holy Spirit or the preaching of faith is the law. This is the question of justification. And on the way to justification, there is no path other than the voice of the Gospel or the voice of the law. Here, then, the law is taken in its broadest sense — as everything that stands apart from the Gospel. It is not only

the ceremonial law that is separate from the Gospel, but also the moral law and the Ten Commandments. Therefore Paul is speaking here of the whole law.

His argument rests on a solid distinction, and it goes like this: 'Tell me,' he says, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law, or by the preaching of the Gospel? Answer me.' You cannot claim it happened through the law. As long as you were under the law and performing its works, you never received the Holy Spirit. You taught and heard the law of Moses every Sabbath — but there is no record of the Holy Spirit ever being given to any teacher or student through the preaching of the law. Beyond that, you not only taught and heard the law — you also worked with all your strength to carry it out. If the Holy Spirit were given through the law, you should have received Him above all others, since you were not merely students of the law but doers of it. And yet you cannot point to a single instance of this happening. But the moment the preaching of faith and the Gospel came to you, you received the Holy Spirit immediately — simply through hearing in faith, before you had done any work or produced any fruit of the Gospel. As Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles, at the very preaching of Peter and Paul the Holy Spirit came upon those who heard the word, and through Him they received various gifts, so that they spoke in new tongues.

It is clear, then, that through the preaching of faith alone you received the Holy Spirit — before you had done any good work or brought forth any fruits of the Gospel. On the other hand, fulfilling the law never produced the Holy Spirit — and much less could merely hearing the law do so. Not only is hearing the law useless for this purpose, but even that passionate zeal with which you set

out to fulfill the law through your works is entirely fruitless. A person may attempt to do everything — he may have a zeal for God and labor with all his energy to be saved by the law, devoting himself day and night to its righteousness — and yet all his effort is wasted and empty. For those who do not know the righteousness of God and seek to establish their own righteousness, as Paul says elsewhere, are not subject to the righteousness of God. Again: 'Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law' (Romans 9:31). Paul here is speaking specifically about the visible coming of the Holy Spirit in the early church. For the Holy Spirit came down visibly upon those who believed, and by this sign He clearly testified that He was present at the apostles' preaching — and also that those who heard the word of faith preached by the apostles were accepted as righteous before God, for otherwise the Holy Spirit would not have come upon them.

The Argument of That Book Which Contains the Acts of the Apostles

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We must therefore pay close attention to the force of this argument, which comes up repeatedly in the book of Acts. That entire book was written to confirm and establish this very point — it teaches nothing other than that the Holy Spirit is given not through the law but through hearing the Gospel. When Peter preached, the Holy Spirit immediately fell upon all who heard him, and in a single day three thousand people who were present at Peter's preaching believed and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Cornelius likewise received the Holy Spirit not through the alms he had given, but while Peter had opened his mouth and was still speaking — the Holy Spirit fell on all who were listening to the word with Cornelius (Acts 10). These are clear evidence, actual experience, and divine acts that cannot deceive us.

Luke records in Acts 15 that after Paul had preached the Gospel together with Barnabas among the Gentiles and had returned to Jerusalem, he stood against the Pharisees and disciples of the apostles who insisted that circumcision and keeping the law were necessary for salvation. Luke says that Paul and Barnabas silenced

them by describing what God had done among the Gentiles through them — and the whole church was astonished at what they heard, especially when they learned how many great miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. Those who were zealous for the law were deeply puzzled: how could uncircumcised Gentiles — who neither followed the law nor did its works, nor possessed the righteousness of the law — still receive this grace and be justified and receive the Holy Spirit just like the circumcised Jews? Paul and Barnabas responded with nothing other than the plain evidence of what had happened — and those arguing for the law were silenced with nothing to say. By this same means, Sergius Paulus the governor, and all those cities, regions, kingdoms, and countries where the apostles had preached, came to believe through the preaching of faith alone — without the law and its works.

The whole book of Acts, then, deals at its core with a single point: that it is necessary for both Jews and Gentiles, both the righteous and the unrighteous, to be justified by faith alone in Christ Jesus — without the law and the works of the law. This is shown both through the preaching of Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip, and the other apostles, and also through the examples drawn from the Gentiles and Jews. Just as God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles who lived without the law through the preaching of the Gospel, so He gave the same Holy Spirit to the Jews — and not through the law or through the ceremonies and sacrifices commanded in the law, but through the preaching of faith alone. Now, if the law could justify and the righteousness of the law were necessary for salvation, then the Holy Spirit would certainly not have been given to Gentiles who did not keep the law. But experience itself plainly

shows that the Holy Spirit was given to them without the law — and the apostles, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and others, saw this themselves. Therefore the law does not justify; only faith in Christ, as proclaimed by the Gospel, justifies.

These things deserve careful attention, especially against those opponents who do not understand what the book of Acts is actually teaching. In former times I read this book myself and understood nothing in it. So when you hear or read the word 'Gentiles' in the Acts of the Apostles — or anywhere else in Scripture — do not take it simply in the ordinary ethnic sense. It carries a spiritual meaning: it refers not to those who are under the law, as the Jews were (as Paul said earlier in chapter two: 'We who are Jews by nature'), but to those who are without the law. Therefore to say that the Gentiles are justified by faith is to say that those who do not observe the law or perform its works, who are not circumcised, who do not offer sacrifices, and so on — these people are justified and receive the Holy Spirit. How? Not through the law and its works, for they have no law — but freely, and by no other means than simply hearing the Gospel.

Cornelius and the friends he had gathered at his house do nothing — they have no prior works to point to — and yet all who are present receive the Holy Spirit. No one speaks except Peter; those sitting with him do nothing. They are not thinking about the law, much less keeping it. They do not offer sacrifice; they do not seek circumcision — they are simply attentive to hear what Peter says. Through his preaching Peter brought the Holy Spirit into their hearts in a visible manner, for they spoke in tongues and glorified God.

But someone may object and ask: How do we know it was the Holy Spirit? Let him raise that objection. What is certain is that the Holy Spirit, in bearing witness in this way, does not lie — He was showing by this that He accepts the Gentiles as righteous and justifies them by no means other than the voice of the Gospel, the hearing of faith in Christ proclaimed. We can also see in Acts how greatly the Jews marveled at this new and unprecedented thing. The believing Jews who had come with Peter to Caesarea were astonished when they saw the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out even on the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. And those in Jerusalem complained that Peter had gone to uncircumcised men and eaten with them (Acts 11:3) — but when they heard Peter explain the whole event concerning Cornelius step by step, they marveled and glorified God, saying (verse 18): 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.'

This news — that God had given salvation to the Gentiles as well — was not only difficult to accept at first, but was actually a serious offense even to believing Jews; they could not easily let go of it. They held a unique privilege above all other nations: they were the people of God — the adoption, the glory, the worship, all of it belonged to them (Romans 9). Furthermore, they had devoted themselves to the righteousness of the law; they had labored all day long; they had borne the burden and the heat of the day. They also had the promises tied to keeping the law — so they could not help but complain against the Gentiles and say: 'Look at this — the Gentiles have only just arrived, and they have not suffered any heat or carried any burden, and yet they receive the same righteousness and the same Holy Spirit without effort — what we could not obtain despite all our labor and toil through the long hot day.

They worked for only an hour, and that little work refreshed them more than it tired them. So has God tormented us with the law all this time, if it counts for nothing in obtaining righteousness? He now puts the Gentiles ahead of us, who have carried the weight of the law for so long. We who are the people of God have been burdened all day long — while those who are not the people of God, who have no law and have done nothing at all, are made equal to us.'

This tension made it absolutely necessary for the apostles' council to be assembled at Jerusalem — to address and settle the minds of the Jews who, though they believed in Christ, still held deep in their hearts the conviction that the law of Moses must be kept. There Peter spoke from his own experience and set himself against this position: 'If God has given the same grace to the Gentiles that He has given to us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?' And again: 'God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us, and He made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.' 'Now therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?' (Acts 15:10). With these words Peter at once dismantled the whole law. It is as if he were saying: We will not keep the law, for we are unable to keep it — but we believe through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, just as they are. So Peter here is entirely focused on this one point: God has given to the Gentiles the very same grace He has given to the Jews. He is saying: When I preached to Cornelius, I learned from my own experience that the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles without the

law, through the hearing of faith alone. Therefore they must not under any circumstances be burdened with the law. In conclusion: since it is certain that neither we nor our fathers were ever able to fulfill the law, you must also let go of the view that righteousness and salvation come through the law. The believing Jews did abandon this view — gradually; but those who were offended by this preaching and refused to repent eventually became completely hardened.

The Commendation of That Book Which Contains the Acts of the Apostles

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In the Acts of the Apostles you will find both explanations and firsthand experience — the preaching of the apostles and living examples — all confirming this point against the stubborn view that righteousness comes through the law. We should therefore love this book all the more and read it with greater diligence, because it contains the most solid testimonies for comforting and strengthening our minds against our papist opponents — our modern-day Jews — whose abominations and painted hypocrisy we resist and condemn through our teaching, in order to set forth the benefits and glory of Christ. The ancient Jews could at least claim that they received the law and all its ceremonies from God himself — the papists cannot even say that. Yet they are no less stubborn in defending their corrupt traditions and abominations than the Jews were in defending their God-given law. Their primary argument is that they hold the office of bishops and that the authority to govern the churches is entrusted to them. They use this to bring us into bondage and to tear from us the article that we are justified not by faith 'formed and adorned with charity' (as they say) but by faith

alone. But we put the book of Acts before them and invite them to read it and consider the examples it contains. There they will find the core message of that entire book: that we are justified by faith alone in Christ without works, and that the Holy Spirit is given through the hearing of faith at the preaching of the Gospel — not through the preaching or performance of the law.

Therefore we teach this: O man, even if you fast, give to the poor, honor your parents, obey the governing authorities, and so on — you are not justified by any of these things. Hearing the voice of the law — 'honor your parents' or any other command — whether heard or fulfilled, does not justify. What does, then? Hearing the voice of the Bridegroom, hearing the word of faith — this hearing justifies. Why? Because it brings the Holy Spirit, who justifies and makes righteous.

From this we can see the difference between the law and the Gospel. The law never brings the Holy Spirit — it only teaches what we ought to do, and therefore it does not justify. But the Gospel brings the Holy Spirit, because it teaches what we ought to receive. The law and the Gospel are therefore two opposite teachings. To ground righteousness in the law is nothing other than to fight against the Gospel. Moses with his law is a strict creditor who demands that we work and give — in short, it demands from us. The Gospel, by contrast, gives freely and asks nothing from us except to hold out our hands and receive what is offered. Demanding and giving are completely opposite and cannot go together. What is given to me, I receive; what I give, I do not receive but offer to another. Therefore if the Gospel is a gift, it requires nothing from us. The law, on the other hand, gives nothing — it demands and strictly requires from us, even things that are impossible.

Of Cornelius in the 10th of Acts

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Here our opponents bring up the example of Cornelius. They say: 'Cornelius was, as Luke records, a devout man — righteous, fearing God, giving alms to the people, and praying to God continually. Therefore by merit of fittingness he deserved the forgiveness of sins and the sending of the Holy Spirit.' My answer is this: Cornelius was a Gentile — our opponents cannot deny this, for Peter's words in Acts 10 make it plain. 'You yourselves know,' Peter says, 'how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean' (Acts 10:28). Cornelius was therefore a Gentile — not circumcised, not keeping the law, not even thinking of it, because it had nothing to do with him. And yet he was justified and received the Holy Spirit. This is the argument, as I said, that runs through the entire book of Acts: the law contributes nothing to righteousness.

Let this be sufficient for defending the article of justification: Cornelius was a Gentile, not circumcised, not keeping the law — therefore he was not justified by the law but by the hearing of faith. God therefore justifies without the law, and as a result the law con-

tributes nothing to righteousness. For if it did, God would have given the Holy Spirit only to the Jews who had the law and kept it — not to Gentiles who had no law and far less fulfilled it. But God did the exact opposite: the Holy Spirit was given to those who did not keep the law. Therefore righteousness does not come through the law. This response answers the objection of those opponents who do not understand the true meaning of justification.

Our opponents press further and say: 'Even granting that Cornelius was a Gentile and did not receive the Holy Spirit through the law — the text still plainly says he was a righteous man who feared God and gave alms. Surely this suggests that by these works he deserved to have the Holy Spirit given to him afterward.' My answer is that Cornelius was a righteous and holy man according to the pattern of the Old Testament, because of his faith in Christ who was yet to come — just as all the patriarchs, prophets, and godly kings were righteous and received the Holy Spirit in an inward way through faith in the coming Christ. But these papist sophists make no distinction between faith in Christ who was yet to come and faith in Christ who has already come. Therefore, if Cornelius had died before Christ was revealed, he would not have been condemned — because he had the faith of the patriarchs, who were saved by faith alone in Christ who was to come (Acts 15:11). He remained always a Gentile — uncircumcised and without the law — and yet he worshipped the same God whom the patriarchs worshipped by faith in the coming Messiah. But now, since the Messiah had already come, it was necessary that Peter the apostle should be sent to show Cornelius that He was no longer to be awaited but had already arrived.

This point about faith in Christ yet to be revealed — let me briefly touch on it here as well — is very important to understand. Since Christ has now been revealed, we cannot be saved by faith in a coming Christ; we must believe that He has already come, has fulfilled all things, and has brought the law to its end. It was therefore necessary that Cornelius be brought to a different kind of faith — not that Christ was still to come, as he had believed before, but that He had already come. So one form of faith gives way to another: 'from faith to faith' (Romans 1:17).

The papist Scholastics are therefore mistaken when, in support of their doctrine of merit before grace, they argue that Cornelius attained grace and the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit through the natural and moral works of reason. To be a righteous man who fears God is not the description of a natural or unregenerate person — it is the description of a spiritual person who already has faith. Without already believing in God and fearing God, a person could not even hope to receive anything from God through prayer. The first commendation Luke gives to Cornelius is that he is a righteous man who fears God; only then does he commend him for his works and acts of charity. Our opponents overlook this and fasten entirely on the sentence about giving alms to the poor, which they defend tooth and nail — because it appears to support their doctrine of merit before grace. But the person — the tree — must be established first, and then the works and the fruit. Cornelius is a good tree, for he is righteous and fears God; therefore he brings forth good fruit: he gives alms and calls upon God, and these fruits are pleasing to God because of his faith. So the angel commends Cornelius for his faith in Christ who was yet to come, and moves him from that faith to faith in Christ who has al-

ready come — saying: 'Send for Simon who is called Peter; he will tell you what you ought to do.' Just as Cornelius had been without the law before Christ was revealed, so after Christ was revealed he received neither the law nor circumcision. As he had not kept the law before, so he did not keep it afterward. The argument therefore stands firm: Cornelius was justified without the law — therefore the law does not justify.

Naaman the Syrian

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Naaman the Syrian was likewise, without question, a good and godly man who held a reverent and sincere view of God. Even though he was a Gentile and had no part in the kingdom of Moses, which was still flourishing at the time, his body was cleansed, the God of Israel was revealed to him, and he received the Holy Spirit. For he himself said: 'Now I know for certain that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel' (2 Kings 5:15). He does nothing at all — he keeps not the law, he is not circumcised. He asks only that as much earth might be given him as two mules could carry away. And it is clear that faith was active in him. For he said to the prophet Elisha: 'Your servant will from now on offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord. But may the Lord pardon your servant for this one thing: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon — when I bow in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant for this.' And the prophet said to him, 'Go in peace.' And so he was justified. The Jew hearing this would burn with anger and say: 'What? Should the Gentile be justified without keeping the law? Should he be placed on equal footing with us who are circumcised?'

The Gentiles Justified Without the Law, Even When the Law and Policy of Moses Was Yet in Force

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Long before Christ came, even while the kingdom of Moses was still standing and flourishing, God was already showing that He justifies people without the law — as He justified many kings in Egypt and Babylon, as well as Job and many nations of the East. The great city of Nineveh was likewise justified and received God's promise that it would not be destroyed but spared. How? Not because it heard and fulfilled the law, but because it believed the word of God that the prophet Jonah preached. The prophet records: 'And the people of Nineveh believed God and called for a fast and put on sackcloth' — that is, they repented. Our opponents cleverly pass over the words 'they believed,' yet the whole point rests there. You do not read in Jonah that the Ninevites received the law of Moses, were circumcised, offered sacrifice, or fulfilled the works of the law — you read that they believed the word and repented in sackcloth and ashes.

All of this happened before Christ was revealed, when faith in the coming Christ was still the reigning form of saving faith. If the Gentiles were justified without the law and received the Holy Spirit inwardly even while the law was still in force — why should the law now be required for righteousness, when Christ's coming has already brought the law to its end? This is therefore a firm and solid argument grounded in the Galatians' own experience: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?' For they were compelled to admit that they had heard nothing about the Holy Spirit before Paul's preaching — but when he preached the Gospel, they received the Holy Spirit.

We today are likewise convicted by our own consciences and forced to confess that the Holy Spirit is given not through the law but through hearing with faith. Many in past times under the papacy worked with great labor and effort to keep the law, the decrees of the church fathers, and the traditions of the pope. Some wore out their bodies through relentless vigils, fasting, and prayer until they could barely function — and yet all they gained was misery and self-torment. They could never arrive at a quiet conscience and peace in Christ; they remained in constant doubt about whether God was favorably disposed toward them. But now that the Gospel teaches that the law and works do not justify — only faith in Jesus Christ — there follows a clear and certain knowledge, a deeply joyful conscience, and a true ability to evaluate every way of life and everything else. The believing person can now readily see that the papacy with all its religious orders and traditions is corrupt — something he could not perceive before. Such was the blindness that gripped the world: we thought that works invented by human beings — not only without God's command but contrary

to it — were far superior to the works that magistrates, heads of households, children, and servants performed in obedience to God's actual commands.

We should have learned from God's word that the religious orders of the papists — which they alone call holy — are corrupt, since there is no commandment of God and no testimony in Scripture approving them. By contrast, other ways of life that have the word and warrant of God are holy and ordained by Him. But we were wrapped in such terrible darkness that we could not rightly judge anything. Now, in the clear light of the Gospel, all the ways of life in the world come under our judgment — a judgment that is certain and reliable. We can boldly declare from God's word that the life of a servant, which the world regards as the most lowly, is far more pleasing to God than all the religious orders of the papists. God commends, approves, and honors the role of servants in His word — but He does not do the same for the orders of monks, friars, and their kind. Therefore this argument grounded in experience should carry great weight for us as well. For even though many people in the papacy performed various works — some of them great and painful — they could never be certain what God's will toward them was; they were always in doubt and could never come to a knowledge of God, of themselves, of their calling, or feel the testimony of the Spirit in their hearts. But now that the truth of the Gospel has appeared, they are fully instructed in all of these things through the hearing of faith alone.

It is not without reason that I spend so much time on these things. To human reason it seems a trivial and simple thing — that the Holy Spirit should be received merely by hearing with faith, and that nothing more is required of us than to set aside all our

works and simply listen to the Gospel. The human heart does not grasp or believe that something so great as the Holy Spirit could be given by the hearing of faith alone. Instead it reasons this way: 'Forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death, the gift of the Holy Spirit, righteousness, and eternal life are immense things. If you want to obtain these priceless benefits, you must perform some equally great and weighty deed.' The devil is well pleased with this reasoning and works to increase it in the heart. So when a person hears that nothing is required to obtain forgiveness of sins except hearing God's word, reason immediately cries out: 'You are making far too little of the forgiveness of sins!' In this way, the immeasurable greatness of the gift is the very reason we cannot believe it — and because this incomparable treasure is freely given, it is despised.

But this we must learn: that forgiveness of sins, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are freely given to us through the hearing of faith alone, despite our terrible sins and our complete unworthiness. We must not dwell on how great the gift is and how unworthy we are of it — for measuring it that way would only terrify us. Instead we must take hold of this truth: that God is pleased to give us this unspeakable gift freely, even to us who are unworthy. As Christ says in Luke: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32) — to give it, He says, to you. To whom? To you who are unworthy — His little flock. If I am small and the gift is great — the greatest of all things — then I must recognize how great He is who gives it. If He offers it and wills to give it, I do not look at my own sin and unworthiness but at His fatherly goodwill toward me as the giver, and I receive this immense

gift with joy and gladness, giving thanks that such an incomparable gift has been freely given to me — yes, to me, the unworthy — through the hearing of faith.

Here foolish reason objects and rebukes us again, saying: 'When you teach people that they must do absolutely nothing to obtain so great and unspeakable a gift — only hear the word of God — this seems to lead to contempt of grace and to make people careless, idle, and loose, so that they slack off and do no good at all. Therefore this teaching should not be preached, for it is not true. People must be pressed to work and strive toward righteousness, and then they will receive this gift.' The Pelagians raised exactly this same objection against Christians in former times. But hear what Paul says here: you received the Holy Spirit not through your own effort and labor, not through the works of the law, but through the hearing of faith. And hear what Christ Himself says in answer to Martha, who was deeply troubled that her sister Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His word instead of helping her with the serving. 'Martha, Martha,' He said, 'you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken from her' (Luke 10:41-42). A person therefore becomes a Christian not by working but by hearing. Therefore whoever wants to grow in righteousness should first exercise himself in hearing the Gospel. When he has heard and received the Gospel, let him give thanks to God with a joyful heart — and then let him practice the good works commanded in the law, so that the law and works follow the hearing of faith. In this way he can walk calmly in the light, which is Christ, and boldly choose and do genuine works — not hypocritical

performances, but truly good works that he knows are commanded by God and pleasing to Him — while rejecting all those hypocritical shadows of self-willed devotion.

Our opponents think that the faith by which we receive the Holy Spirit is a simple and easy thing — but how lofty and demanding it actually is, I know from my own experience, as do all who earnestly embrace it alongside me. It is quickly said that the Holy Spirit is received through the hearing of faith alone — but it is not so easily heard, grasped, believed, and held on to as it is said. Therefore when you hear from me that Christ is the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for your sins, make sure you hear it truly. Paul deliberately calls it 'the hearing of faith' rather than merely 'the word of faith' — though the difference is small — meaning this: it is a word that you, in hearing it, actually believe, so that the word is not merely my voice but enters your heart and is believed by you. When that happens, it is truly and genuinely the hearing of faith, through which you receive the Holy Spirit — and once you have received Him, you will also mortify your flesh.

Believers discover in their own experience how eagerly they want to hold and embrace the word when they hear it — to believe it fully and let go of all confidence in the law and their own righteousness — and yet they feel powerful resistance in their flesh against the Spirit. Reason and the flesh insist on working together. The thought 'you must be circumcised and keep the law' cannot be fully rooted out of our minds; it clings firmly in the hearts of all believers. So there is a constant conflict in believers between the hearing of faith and the works of the law. The conscience constantly murmurs and thinks: 'This is too easy a path — that righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life are promised simply

through hearing the word.' But come to an honest test of it, and then tell me how easy it really is to hear the word of faith. The Giver is great — and He gives great things willingly and freely, without reproaching anyone for their unworthiness. But your capacity to receive is strained, and your faith is weak, still fighting against you, so that you struggle to take hold of this gift. Even so, however much your conscience murmurs against you and however often this 'you must' rises up in your mind, stand firm and hold on until you overcome it. As faith grows little by little, that assumption of righteousness through the law will shrink. But this cannot happen without a great struggle.

Verse 3. Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Having concluded his argument — that the Holy Spirit does not come through the works of the law but through the preaching of faith — Paul now begins to exhort the Galatians and warns them of two serious dangers. The first is: 'Are you so foolish that, having begun in the Spirit, you would now end in the flesh?' The second follows right after: 'Have you suffered so many things in vain?' It is as if he were saying: You began in the Spirit — that is, your Christian life had an excellent start. As he says a little later: 'You were running well' (Galatians 5:7). But what have you gained by it? In truth, you are now ending in the flesh — indeed, you are already ending in the flesh.

Paul here sets the Spirit against the flesh. By 'flesh' he does not mean — as I have noted before — lust, animal passions, or sensual desires; he is not addressing lust or other bodily cravings here. Rather, he is talking about forgiveness of sins, the justifying of the conscience, the obtaining of righteousness before God, and deliv-

erance from the law, sin, and death — and yet he says they have abandoned the Spirit and are now ending in the flesh. Here 'flesh' means the very righteousness and wisdom of fallen human nature — the judgment of reason that tries to become righteous through the law. Whatever is best and most excellent in a person — the wisdom of reason, yes, and the righteousness of the law itself — Paul here calls 'flesh.'

This passage must be carefully weighed, especially against the slanderous and fault-finding papists who twist it against us, saying that we in our time began in the Spirit but now, having taken wives, we are ending in the flesh. As if living without a wife were what constitutes a spiritual life — and as if it were no obstacle to spiritual life for a man, not content with one mistress, to keep many. These are people who do not understand what the Spirit is, or what the flesh is. The Spirit is whatever is done in us through the Spirit; the flesh is whatever is done in us according to fallen human nature and without the Spirit. Therefore all the duties of a Christian man — loving his wife, raising his children, governing his household, and the like, which the papists dismiss as worldly and carnal — are in fact fruits of the Spirit. These blind critics cannot tell the difference between good gifts of God and vices.

It should also be noted that Paul says the Galatians 'began' in the Spirit. He could have written this actively: 'Are you now being completed in the flesh?' — but he does not. Instead he uses the passive: 'Are you being completed in the flesh?' — or more precisely, 'Are you being ended in the flesh?' The righteousness of the law, which Paul calls 'flesh' here, is so far from justifying that those who, after receiving the Holy Spirit through hearing with faith, fall back to it, are in fact ended in it — that is, utterly destroyed by it.

Therefore, whoever teaches that the law must be fulfilled in order to be justified, while trying to quiet people's consciences, actually harms those consciences — and while trying to justify people, actually condemns them.

Paul throughout this letter keeps taking aim at the false apostles, who were still insisting on the law — saying: 'Faith in Christ alone does not take away sin, does not appease the wrath of God, does not justify. Therefore if you want these benefits, you must not only believe in Christ but also keep the law, be circumcised, observe the festivals, offer sacrifices, and so on.' Paul answers: 'On the contrary — by doing those very things you establish unrighteousness, you provoke the wrath of God, you pile sin upon sin, you quench the Spirit, you fall away from grace and completely reject it, and you and your disciples together are ending in the flesh.' This is the first danger from which Paul warns the Galatians — that if they seek to be justified by the law, they will lose the Spirit and exchange a good beginning for a wretched end.

Verse 4. Did you suffer so many things in vain?

The second danger and loss is this: 'Did you suffer so many things in vain?' It is as if Paul were saying: Consider not only how well you began and how miserably you have abandoned your good start and your course so well begun. Not only have you lost the first fruits of the Spirit, falling back into the ministry of sin and death and into the painful bondage of the law — but consider also that you have suffered much for the sake of the Gospel and the name of Christ. You endured the loss of your possessions, insults and slander, and dangers to your bodies and your lives. Everything was going well and moving forward. You taught the truth purely, you lived holy lives, and you bore many hardships steadfastly for

the name of Christ. But now all of it is lost — both the teaching and the faith, both the doing and the suffering, both the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit.

From this it is clear what harm the righteousness of the law and human merit brings — those who trust in it lose immeasurable blessings in an instant. What a terrible thing it is to so suddenly lose such incomparable glory and the assurance of a clear conscience before God — and to have endured so many great and grievous afflictions, the loss of goods, wife, children, body, and life, and yet to have endured all of it for nothing. From these two points — the loss of the Spirit and the loss of all suffering for Christ's sake — a great deal of material could be gathered to expose and set forth at length the true commendation of the law and human righteousness, if one were to take each part separately and consider what Spirit it was they began with, and what great and numerous afflictions they endured for Christ. But no eloquence can adequately express these things. What Paul is dealing with here are immeasurable realities: the glory of God, victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, righteousness and eternal life — and on the other side, sin, despair, eternal death, and hell. And yet in a moment we lose all these incomparable gifts and bring upon ourselves these horrible and endless miseries — all through false teachers who lead us away from the truth of the Gospel into false teaching. And they accomplish this not only easily, but under the guise of great holiness.

Verse 4. If indeed it was in vain.

Paul adds this as a qualification — softening the sharp rebuke that came before. He does this as an apostle, so as not to crush the Galatians with too much severity. Even while rebuking them, he al-

ways does it in a way that mixes in a touch of comfort, lest he drive them to despair.

Paul says: 'If indeed it was in vain.' It is as if he were saying: I have not removed all hope from you. But if you are going to end in the flesh — that is, if you are going to follow the righteousness of the law and abandon the Spirit, as you have begun to do — then know this: all your confidence and glory before God has been in vain, and all your sufferings have been wasted. I must speak somewhat more directly to you on this matter; I must be more forceful in defending the truth and sharper in rebuking you — especially since the issue is so serious, and the situation demands it — lest you think it is a trivial thing to reject the teaching of Paul and take up another. Nevertheless, I will not leave you without hope, so long as you repent and change course. Sick and weak children must not be abandoned but must be cared for more diligently than those who are well. So Paul, like a skilled physician, lays the blame almost entirely on the false apostles — the authors and the only real cause of this deadly disease. At the same time he treats the Galatians with great gentleness, hoping that through this gentleness he may heal them and restore them. Following Paul's example, we also ought to rebuke the weak in such a way that, while we address and remove their sickness, we also continue to encourage and comfort them — lest if we handle them too harshly, we drive them to despair.

Verse 5. So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

This argument drawn from the Galatians' own experience pleases Paul so much that after rebuking and warning them with a double danger, he returns to it again — this time expanding it further. 'He who provides the Spirit,' and so on. That is to say: You have not only received the Spirit through the hearing of faith — everything you have ever known or done, you have through the hearing of faith. It is as if he were saying: It was not enough for God to give you the Spirit once — He also enriched you with the gifts of the Spirit and caused them to grow in you, so that having once received the Spirit, He would continue to increase and become more effective in you. This makes it clear that the Galatians had worked miracles, or at the very least had shown such fruits of faith as true disciples of the Gospel are accustomed to bear. The apostle says elsewhere that the kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20). This power means not only the ability to speak about the kingdom of God, but actually showing that God is at work through His Spirit in us. So Paul says of himself in chapter two: 'He who was at work in Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised was also at work in me for mine to the Gentiles' (Galatians 2:8).

When a preacher preaches in such a way that the word is not empty but bears fruit — that is, when faith, hope, love, and patience follow — God gives His Spirit and works miracles in the hearers. Paul says here that God gave His Spirit to the Galatians and worked miracles among them. It is as if he were saying: Through my preaching God accomplished not only that you would believe, but that you would live holy lives, bring forth many fruits of faith, and endure many afflictions. By the same power of the Holy Spirit you were transformed — from adulterers, the wrathful,

the impatient, and the greedy — into generous, chaste, gentle, patient, and loving neighbors. He then testifies of them in chapter four that they received him as an angel of God — indeed, as Christ Jesus Himself — and that they loved him so intensely they would have plucked out their own eyes for him.

To love your neighbor so wholeheartedly that you are ready to give your money, your possessions, your eyes, and everything you have for his good — and on top of that to bear all hardships and afflictions with patience — these are without question the effects and fruits of the Spirit. And these, Paul says, you received and enjoyed before the false teachers came among you. You received them not through the law but from God, who provided and daily increased His Holy Spirit in you — so that the Gospel flourished remarkably among you in teaching, believing, working, and suffering. Since you know all of this — being convicted by the very testimony of your own consciences — how is it that you are no longer bearing the same fruits as before? Why are you no longer teaching the truth, believing faithfully, living holy lives, working rightly, and suffering patiently? And finally: who has so corrupted you that you no longer have the same warm affection for me that you once had? That you no longer receive Paul as an angel of God, nor as Christ Jesus? That you would not now pluck out your eyes to give them to me? How is it, I ask, that your former zeal for me has grown so cold, and that you now prefer these false apostles — who miserably mislead you — above me?

Something similar has happened to us in our own day. When we first preached the Gospel, many people were drawn to our teaching and held it in high regard, and after the preaching of it, the operations and fruits of faith followed. But then what hap-

pened? A number of unstable and confused people sprang up and quickly destroyed everything that we had planted over a long time with great labor — and they also made us hateful to those who had previously loved us deeply and received our teaching with gratitude, so that now there is nothing they hate more than our name. But the devil is the source of this damage, working through his followers to produce the opposite of what the Holy Spirit produces. Therefore, says the apostle, your own experience — O Galatians — ought to teach you that these great and excellent miracles did not come from the works of the law. For just as you did not have them before you heard the Gospel preached with faith, so you do not have them now, even though the false apostles reign in your midst.

We can say the same thing today to those who claim to be followers of the Gospel and to have been freed from the pope's tyranny: Did you overcome the pope's tyranny and find liberty in Christ through the Anabaptists and other such fanatics — or through us, who preached faith in Jesus Christ? If they will be honest, they must say: without any doubt, it was through the preaching of faith. And it is true that at the beginning of our preaching, the teaching of faith had a remarkably fruitful season — the pope's indulgences, purgatory, vows, Masses, and similar abominations came crashing down, and with them the whole structure of the papacy began to fall. No one could rightly condemn us, for our teaching was pure — it lifted up and comforted many poor consciences that had been crushed for a long time under human traditions in the papacy, which was open tyranny, a tormenting and crucifying of consciences. Many therefore gave thanks to God that through the Gospel — which by God's grace we were the first to preach — they had been so powerfully delivered

from these snares and from this slaughterhouse of consciences. But when these new unstable people sprang up and set about discrediting us by every means, our teaching began to be viewed with suspicion — for it was widely rumored that those who held it disagreed among themselves. Many people were deeply troubled by this and fell away entirely from the truth, which gave the papists hope that we and our teaching would soon come to nothing, and that they would recover their former authority.

Just as the false apostles insisted strongly that the Galatians — who had been justified by faith in Christ — now needed to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses if they wanted to be delivered from their sins and from God's wrath and to receive the Holy Spirit — and yet by doing exactly that they loaded the Galatians with more sin (for sin is not taken away by the law, nor is the Holy Spirit given through it — the law only produces wrath and drives people into terror) — so today these reckless people, who thought they were securing the welfare of the church and overthrowing the papacy at a single blow, have not done good but great harm to the church. They have not overthrown the papacy; they have only strengthened it.

But if they had continued as they began — if they had with one mind, together with us, taught and pressed the article of justification: that we are justified neither by the righteousness of the law nor by our own righteousness, but by faith alone in Jesus Christ — this one article, little by little as it had begun to do, would have overthrown the whole papacy, with all its brotherhoods, indulgences, religious orders, relics, ceremonies, invocation of saints, purgatory, Masses, vigils, vows, and countless other abominations. But they abandoned the preaching of faith and true Christian

righteousness and went a different direction, to the great damage of sound teaching and of the churches. It has happened to them much as the old Dutch proverb says: they drove away the fish the net was closing in around, by trying to catch them with their bare hands.

Verse 6. Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Up to this point Paul has grounded his argument on the experience of the Galatians, and he has pressed it strongly. 'You believed,' he says, 'and in believing you worked miracles and showed many remarkable signs — and beyond that, you endured many afflictions. All of these things are the effects and work not of the law but of the Holy Spirit.' The Galatians were compelled to acknowledge this. They could not deny what had been before their eyes and was subject to their own senses — and therefore this argument drawn from their own experience is very powerful.

Now Paul adds the example of Abraham and cites the testimony of Scripture. The first citation is from Genesis: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). Paul develops this passage with great force here, as he also does in his letter to the Romans (Romans 4:2-3). 'If Abraham was made righteous by the works of the law,' he says, 'he has something to boast about — but not before God, only before other people; for before God he still has sin and wrath.' Abraham was justified before God not because he worked but because he believed. For Scripture says: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Paul expands on this passage memorably in Romans (Romans 4:19-21): 'Abraham did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead

since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in faith and gave glory to God, being fully convinced that what God had promised He was also able to perform. Therefore it was credited to him as righteousness.' And Paul adds: 'But the words, it was credited to him, were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also' (Romans 4:23-24).

With the words 'Abraham believed,' Paul makes faith in God the highest form of worship, the highest duty, the highest obedience, and the highest sacrifice. Let anyone with a gift for rhetoric develop this passage at length and he will see that faith is an almighty thing, whose power is beyond measure and without limit. For faith gives glory to God — which is the highest possible service one can give Him. To give glory to God means to believe in Him, to regard Him as true, wise, righteous, merciful, and almighty — to acknowledge Him as the source and giver of all goodness. Reason does not do this; faith does. This is what makes us people of God — it is, one might say, the creator of a kind of divinity in us, not in the substance of God, but in us. For without faith, God loses in us His glory, wisdom, righteousness, truth, and mercy. In short: wherever there is no faith, God's majesty and divinity have no place in us. The greatest thing God requires of a person is to give Him His glory and honor — that is, to treat Him not as an idol but as God, who takes notice of us, hears us, shows mercy, and helps. When this is done, God has His full and perfect honor among us — that is, He receives everything that a believing heart can give Him. To be able to give that glory to God is therefore the wisdom of all wisdoms, the righteousness of all righteousnesses, the truest religion,

and the greatest sacrifice. From this we can understand how high and excellent a righteousness faith is — and by contrast, how terrible and grievous a sin unbelief is.

Whoever therefore believes God's word as Abraham did is righteous before God, because he has faith, which gives glory to God — that is, he renders to God what is due Him. Faith says: 'I believe You, O God, when You speak.' And what does God speak? To the ear of reason: impossible things, falsehoods, foolish and absurd things, worthless and scandalous things. For what is more absurd, foolish, and impossible to reason than God's word to Abraham — that he would have a son by his barren and aged wife Sarah?

If we follow the judgment of reason, God presents us with impossible and absurd statements when He sets before us the articles of the Christian faith. To reason it seems absurd and foolish that in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are offered to us; that baptism is the washing of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit; that the dead will rise on the last day; that Christ the Son of God was conceived and carried in the womb of the virgin Mary; that He was born, suffered the most shameful death of the cross, was raised again, now sits at the right hand of God the Father, and holds all authority in heaven and on earth. This is why Paul calls the Gospel of Christ crucified the 'word of the cross' and 'foolish preaching' — a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:18-23). Reason therefore does not understand that hearing God's word and believing it is the highest service God requires of us — instead it thinks that whatever it chooses and does with good intentions and sincere personal devotion is

what pleases God. And so when God speaks, reason judges His word to be heresy, the word of the devil — because it seems absurd and foolish.

But faith slays reason — it kills that beast which the whole world and all creation together cannot kill. Abraham killed it by faith in God's word, by which word a child was promised him through Sarah, who was barren and now well past the age of child-bearing. Reason did not immediately yield in Abraham — without doubt it fought against faith in him, judging it absurd, foolish, and impossible that Sarah, now ninety years old and naturally barren, should bear a son. So faith wrestled with reason in Abraham — and faith won. Faith killed and sacrificed reason, that most cruel and destructive enemy of God. So all the godly, following Abraham into the darkness of faith, put reason to death and say: 'Reason, you are foolish — you do not grasp the things of God. So do not argue against me, but be silent. Do not judge; instead hear the word of God and believe it.' In this way the godly, by faith, slay a beast greater than the whole world — and in doing so offer to God the most acceptable sacrifice and service.

Compared to this sacrifice of the faithful, all the religions of all nations and all the works of all monks and merit-seekers are nothing at all. By this sacrifice, first of all — as I said — they slay reason, the great and mighty enemy of God. For reason despises God and denies His wisdom, righteousness, power, truth, mercy, majesty, and divinity. Furthermore, by the same sacrifice they give glory to God: they believe Him to be righteous, good, faithful, and true; they believe He can do all things; they believe all His words

are holy, true, living, and effective — which is the most acceptable obedience to God. Therefore there is no greater or holier religion in the world, and no more acceptable service to God, than faith.

By contrast, those who seek righteousness by their own works — lacking faith — do many things. They fast, they pray, they keep vigils, they take up crosses. But because they think to appease God's wrath and earn grace by these things, they give no glory to God — that is, they do not regard Him as merciful, faithful, and true to His promises, but as an angry judge who must be appeased by works. In this way they despise God, treat all His promises as lies, deny Christ and all His benefits, and in the end push God from His throne and set themselves in His place. For by rejecting and despising God's word, they choose for themselves forms of worship and works that God has not commanded. They imagine that God takes pleasure in these things and hope to receive His reward for them. Therefore they do not kill reason, that mighty enemy of God — they strengthen it. And they strip God of His majesty and divinity, attributing it instead to their own works. Therefore only faith gives glory to God, as Paul testifies regarding Abraham: 'He grew strong in faith and gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised — therefore it was credited to him as righteousness' (Romans 4:20-22).

Paul does not add this quotation from Genesis 15 without purpose: 'And it was credited to him as righteousness.' Christian righteousness consists of two things: the faith of the heart, and God's imputation. Faith is indeed a real and genuine righteousness — and yet faith alone is not enough, because after faith there remain certain remnants of sin in our flesh. This sacrifice of faith began in

Abraham, but it was completed only at his death. Therefore the second part of righteousness must also be added to complete it in us — namely, God's imputation. For faith does not give God everything He deserves, because faith itself is imperfect. In fact, our faith is but a small spark, just beginning to render to God His true glory. We have received the first fruits of the Spirit, but not yet the fullness. Beyond this, reason is not completely put to death in this life, as is evident from our sinful desires, anger, impatience, and other fruits of the flesh and of remaining unbelief in us. Even the holiest among the living do not yet have full and constant joy in God; they have their varying emotions — sometimes sorrowful, sometimes glad — as Scripture testifies of the prophets and apostles. But these faults are not charged against them because of their faith in Christ — for otherwise no one in the flesh would be saved. We conclude therefore from the words 'it was credited to him as righteousness' that righteousness does begin through faith, and that through faith we have the first fruits of the Spirit. But because faith is weak, it is not made complete apart from God's imputation. Faith therefore begins righteousness, and imputation perfects it until the day of Christ.

The papist sophists and Scholastics also discuss imputation when they speak of God's acceptance of a work — but they do so in a way that is contrary to Scripture, twisting it to apply only to works. They do not consider the inner corruption and poison lurking in the heart: unbelief, doubt, contempt of God, hatred of God — these most dangerous and destructive passions, which are the source and cause of all wickedness. They see no further than external and obvious faults and wrongdoing, which are merely small streams flowing out from those fountains. And so they attribute

God's acceptance to works — saying that God accepts our works not because He must but by fittingness. We, by contrast, exclude all works and go straight to the head of this beast called reason, which is the very fountainhead and source of all evil. For reason does not fear God, does not love God, and does not trust in God — it proudly despises Him. It is moved neither by His warnings nor by His promises. It takes no delight in His words or works but murmurs against Him, grows angry with Him, judges Him, and hates Him. In short, it is an enemy of God who refuses to give Him His glory. Once this pestilent beast — reason — is slain, all external and obvious vices would amount to nothing.

Therefore we must first and above all things work through faith to kill unbelief — the contempt and hatred of God, the grumbling against His judgments and His wrath, against all His words and works. For it is in this way that we kill reason, which can be killed by no other means than by faith — faith that in believing God gives Him His glory, even when He speaks things that seem foolish, absurd, and impossible to reason. God presents Himself to us in a way that reason cannot judge or comprehend, saying: 'I will count you and declare you righteous — not for keeping the law, not for your works and merits, but for your faith in Jesus Christ My only begotten Son, who was born, suffered, was crucified, and died for your sins. And the sin that remains in you, I will not count against you.' If reason is not killed, and if every form of religion and service to God invented by human beings to earn righteousness before God is not condemned, the righteousness of faith can find no room.

When reason hears this, it is immediately offended — it rages and unleashes all its hostility against God, saying: 'Are my good works then worth nothing? Have I labored and borne the burden and heat of the day for nothing?' From this comes the uprising of nations, kings, and princes against the Lord and against His Christ (Psalm 2:2). The world will not and cannot tolerate having its wisdom, righteousness, religions, and devotions reproved and condemned. The pope with all his company will not admit to being in error — much less will he allow himself to be condemned.

Therefore let those who study the word of God learn from this saying — 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' — to define true Christian righteousness rightly and accurately: it is faith and trust in the Son of God, or more precisely, a confidence of the heart toward God through Jesus Christ. And let them add this defining clause: 'This faith and confidence is credited as righteousness for Christ's sake.' For these two things, as I said before, produce Christian righteousness: faith in the heart, which is God's gift and which truly believes in Christ — and God's acceptance of this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness for Christ's sake, in whom I have begun to believe. Because of this faith in Christ, God does not see my doubts about His goodwill toward me, my distrust, my heaviness of spirit, or the other sins that remain in me. For as long as I live in the flesh, sin is truly present in me. But because I am sheltered under the shadow of Christ's wings — as a chick under the wing of a hen — and dwell without fear under that vast and spacious heaven of forgiveness spread over me, God covers and pardons the remaining sin in me. That is:

because of the faith with which I have begun to lay hold of Christ, He accepts my imperfect righteousness as perfect righteousness and does not count my sin as sin — even though it truly is sin.

So we hide ourselves under the covering of Christ's flesh — He is our cloud by day and our fire by night — so that God does not see our sin. And even when we do see our sin and feel the terror of conscience on account of it, we flee to Christ our Mediator and reconciler, through whom we are made complete — and we are safe and secure. For all things are in Him, and through Him we have all things; He supplies whatever is lacking in us. When we believe this, God overlooks all our sins and the remnants of them still clinging to our flesh, and wills that they be so covered as though they were no sins. 'Because you believe in My Son,' He says, 'even though you have many sins, they must be forgiven you, until you are fully delivered from them through death.'

Let Christians study this article of Christian righteousness with all diligence. To that end let them read Paul — read him again and again, carefully and repeatedly — comparing earlier passages with later ones, and indeed reading Paul as a whole in light of himself. Then they will find it to be true that Christian righteousness consists in two things: faith, which gives glory to God, and God's imputation. For faith is weak, as I have said, and therefore God's imputation must accompany it — meaning that God will not count the remaining sin against us, will not punish us for it, and will not condemn us for it, but will cover it and freely forgive it as though it were nothing at all. Not for our own sake, nor for our worth or our works, but for the sake of Jesus Christ in whom we believe.

So a Christian is at once righteous and a sinner, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God. No sophist will accept this combination, for they do not understand the true nature of justification. This is what drove them to demand that people do good works until they felt no sin in them at all — and in doing so they drove many people who were striving with all their strength to be perfectly righteous, but could not achieve it, to the point of utter despair. And countless even among those who promoted this wicked teaching were themselves driven to despair at the hour of death. The same would have happened to me, had Christ not mercifully looked upon me and delivered me from this error.

By contrast, we teach and comfort the troubled sinner this way: 'Brother, it is not possible in this life for you to become so righteous that you feel no sin at all — that your body should be as clear as the sun, without spot or blemish. You still have wrinkles and blemishes, and yet you are holy nonetheless.' 'But how can I be holy,' you might ask, 'when I have sin in me and feel it?' I answer: The very fact that you feel and acknowledge your sin is a good sign. Give thanks to God and do not despair. Recognizing and confessing one's disease is the first step toward healing. 'But how shall I be delivered from sin?' Run to Christ the Physician, who heals the brokenhearted and saves sinners. Do not follow the judgment of reason, which tells you He is angry with sinners — kill reason and believe in Christ. If you believe, you are righteous, because you are giving glory to God — acknowledging that He is almighty, merciful, and true. You are justifying and praising God. In short, you are rendering to Him His divinity and everything that belongs to Him. The sin remaining in you is not counted against you but is par-

doned for the sake of Christ in whom you believe, who is perfectly righteous — His righteousness is your righteousness, and your sin is His sin.

Here we see that every Christian is a high priest. First he offers up and slays his own reason and the wisdom of the flesh. Then he gives glory to God — acknowledging that He is righteous, true, patient, compassionate, and merciful. This is the daily sacrifice of the new covenant, which must be offered morning and evening. The evening sacrifice is the slaying of reason. The morning sacrifice is the glorifying of God. So a Christian is daily and continually engaged in this double sacrifice and its exercise. No one can adequately express the excellence and dignity of this Christian sacrifice.

This is therefore a remarkable and wonderful definition of Christian righteousness: it is God's imputation of righteousness — or imputation for righteousness — on account of our faith in Christ, or for Christ's sake. When the papist Scholastics hear this definition, they laugh at it. They imagine that righteousness is a kind of quality poured into the soul and then spreading through all parts of a person. They cannot set aside the foolish assumptions of reason, which tells them that sound judgment and a good will or a good intention constitute true righteousness. But this unspeakable gift exceeds all reason — that God counts as righteous and declares righteous, without works, the person who embraces His Son by faith alone, that Son who was sent into the world, was born, suffered, and was crucified for us.

In terms of the words, this is not a complicated matter — that righteousness does not reside essentially in us but outside us, in God's grace alone and in His imputation; and that there is no in-

herent righteousness residing in us apart from that weak faith, or first fruits of faith, by which we have begun to take hold of Christ, while sin in the meantime truly remains in us. But in reality it is no small or trivial matter — it is serious and of the greatest importance. For Christ, who was given for us and whom we lay hold of by faith, has done no small thing for us and has not trifled with us. As Paul said before: He loved us and gave Himself for us in very truth; He was made a curse for us. It is no empty idea that Christ was delivered up for my sins and was made a curse for me, so that I might be delivered from eternal death. Therefore to take hold of that Son by faith, and with the heart to believe in Him who was given for us and to us by God — this causes God to count that faith, even though it is imperfect, as perfect righteousness.

We are in an entirely different realm from reason — far from it — where we do not debate what we ought to do or by what works we might earn grace and forgiveness. We are here in the realm of high and heavenly theology, where we hear this Gospel — this good news — that Christ died for us, and that in believing this, we are counted righteous, even though sin still remains in us, and terrible sin at that. Our Savior Christ Himself defines the righteousness of faith in the same way. He says: 'The Father loves you' (John 16:27). Why does He love you? Not because you were Pharisees blameless in the righteousness of the law, not because you were circumcised, not because you did good works and fasted, and so on. Rather: 'I chose you out of the world, and you have done nothing except love Me and believe that I came from the Father.' 'This reality of My being sent from the Father into the world pleased you, and because you took hold of it and embraced it, the Father loves you and you are pleasing to Him.' And yet elsewhere He calls these same disci-

ples sinful and tells them to pray for forgiveness. These two things are directly opposite: that a Christian is righteous and beloved of God, and yet is at the same time a sinner. For God cannot deny His own nature — He must hate sin and sinners, and He does so necessarily, for otherwise He would be unjust and would be loving sin. How then can these two opposite truths stand together? I am a sinner and fully deserving of God's wrath and indignation — and yet the Father loves me? Nothing stands between these two realities except Christ the Mediator. 'The Father does not love you,' Jesus says, 'because you are worthy of love, but because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from Him.'

So a Christian lives in true humility — genuinely feeling sin in himself and confessing himself worthy of wrath, God's judgment, and eternal death — so that he is kept humble in this life. And yet at the same time he continues in a holy boldness, turning to Christ and lifting himself up through Christ against this felt sense of God's wrath and judgment — believing not only that the remnants of sin are not counted against him, but that he is loved by the Father, not for his own sake but for the sake of Christ whom the Father loves.

From this we can now see how faith justifies without works — and also why the imputation of righteousness is necessary. Sin remains in us, and God utterly hates sin. Therefore we must have the imputation of righteousness, which we receive through Christ and for Christ's sake, who is given to us and received by us through faith. In the meantime, for as long as we live here, we are carried and nourished in the lap of God's mercy and patience, until the body of sin is abolished and we are raised as new creatures on that great day. Then there will be new heavens and a new earth, in

which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). For now, under this present heaven, sin and wicked people dwell — and the godly too have sin dwelling in them. This is why Paul in Romans 7 complains about the sin that remains even in the saints — and yet afterward in chapter 8 he declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). How are these contradictions resolved — that sin in us is not counted as sin? That one who deserves condemnation will not be condemned? That one who is rejected will not be rejected? That one who is worthy of God's wrath and eternal punishment will not be punished? The only reconciler of these opposites is the one Mediator between God and humanity — the man Christ Jesus — as Paul says: 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'

Verse 7. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

This is Paul's central and overarching argument against the Jews — that those who believe are the children of Abraham, not those who are descended from his flesh and blood. Paul presses this argument forcefully here and in chapters 4 and 9 of Romans. The Jews' greatest confidence and glory was this: 'We are the seed and children of Abraham.' Their reasoning followed: 'He was circumcised and kept the law; therefore, to be true children of Abraham, we must follow our father.' Without a doubt it was a remarkable privilege and great honor to be Abraham's descendants — no one could deny that God spoke to and about the seed of Abraham. But this privilege did the unbelieving Jews no good at all. For this reason Paul, especially in this passage, fights powerfully against this argument and strips from the Jews their proud confidence in it. As God's chosen instrument, Paul was uniquely

equipped to do this above all others — if we had tried to argue against the Jews from the beginning without Paul, we would likely have made very little headway.

Paul argues against the Jews who stood so proudly on their identity as Abraham's children. Their claim was: 'We are Abraham's seed.' 'Very well,' Paul says, 'what of it?' 'Abraham was circumcised and kept the law — we do the same.' 'All of this I grant you.' 'Are you therefore to be justified and saved by it?' No, not by that. Let us go back to the patriarch Abraham himself and look at how he was justified and saved. Not by his excellent virtues and holy works — not by leaving his homeland, his relatives, and his father's house; not by being circumcised and keeping the law; not by his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command, the son in whom the promise of his descendants rested. He was justified because he believed. Therefore he was justified by no other means than by faith alone. If you are to be justified by the law, then certainly Abraham your father ought to have been justified by the law far more than you. But Abraham could not be justified or receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit by any other means than faith alone. Since Scripture itself testifies to this, why do you make so much of circumcision and the law, insisting that you have righteousness and salvation through them — when your own father Abraham, the very source of your boast, was justified and saved without them, by faith alone? What can be said against this argument?

Paul therefore draws this conclusion: those who are of faith are the children of Abraham — physical birth or natural descent does not make someone a child of Abraham before God. He is saying: no one is counted as a child of the true Abraham — the servant of

God whom God chose and made righteous by faith — through physical descent alone. Abraham must have children given to him before God who are children in the same way he was a father. But he was a father in faith — justified and pleasing to God not because he could produce children in the flesh, not because he had circumcision and the law, but because he believed in God. Therefore, whoever wants to be a child of the believing Abraham must himself also believe — otherwise he is not a child of the elect, accepted, and justified Abraham, but only of the procreating Abraham, who apart from faith is simply a person conceived, born, and wrapped in sin, without forgiveness, without faith, without the Holy Spirit — condemned like any other person. Such too are the children physically born from him — they carry nothing from their father except flesh and blood, sin and death. Therefore these also are condemned. That proud boast — 'We are the seed of Abraham' — is completely empty.

Paul sets out this argument clearly in Romans 9 by means of two examples from Scripture. The first is the case of Ishmael and Isaac, who were both the natural, physical children of Abraham. And yet Ishmael — who was begotten by Abraham just as Isaac was, and who would have had the privilege of the firstborn if physical descent had any standing before God — is excluded. The Scripture says: 'In Isaac shall your offspring be named' (Romans 9:7). The second example is Esau and Jacob, who, while still in the womb having done nothing good or evil, were told: 'The older will serve the younger' and 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated' (Romans 9:12-13). It is therefore clear that those who are of faith are the children of Abraham.

But some will object here — as the Jews do, and certain overconfident people today who wish to appear knowledgeable — saying that the Hebrew word for 'faith' in this passage means 'truth,' and that we are therefore misusing it in this context. They add that Genesis 15 is speaking about a physical thing — the promise of descendants — and therefore Paul is not entitled to apply it to faith in Christ; it should simply be understood as Abraham's faith in God's promise that he would have offspring. By this they hope to show that Paul's arguments and citations prove nothing. In the same way they might object that Paul's later citation from Habakkuk speaks of faith concerning the fulfillment of that vision as a whole, not specifically of faith in Christ, for which purpose Paul uses it. Likewise they might twist all of Hebrews 11, which speaks of faith and the examples of faith. By these arguments such vain and arrogant people hunt for praise and seek to be considered wise and learned — where they least deserve it. But for the sake of simple and less-informed readers, we will briefly answer their objections.

To the first objection I answer this: faith is nothing other than the truth of the heart — that is, a right and genuine conviction about God. Faith alone thinks and judges rightly about God; reason does not. A person thinks rightly about God when he believes God's word. But when he tries to understand God without the word and trusts in him according to the wisdom of reason, he has no right understanding of God and therefore cannot think or judge of Him as he should. Take the example of a monk who imagines that his robe, his shaved head, and his vows please God, and that grace and eternal life are given to him on account of these things — he has no true understanding of God but a false and godless one. Truth therefore is faith itself, which judges rightly about God:

namely, that God does not regard our works and righteousness, since we are unclean, but that He will have mercy on us, look upon us, accept us, justify us, and save us — if we believe in His Son, whom He sent to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. This is a true understanding of God — and in fact it is nothing other than faith itself. I cannot grasp or be fully assured by reason that I have been received into God's favor for Christ's sake; I hear this declared in the Gospel and I take hold of it by faith.

To the second objection I answer that Paul rightly uses the passage from Genesis 15, applying it to faith in Christ. For faith must always be joined with a certain assurance of God's mercy. This assurance includes a confident trust in the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. It is impossible for the conscience to look for anything from God unless it is first assured that God is merciful to it for Christ's sake. Therefore all the promises must be referred back to that first promise concerning Christ: 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head' (Genesis 3:15). All the prophets understood it this way and taught it this way. From this we see that the faith of our fathers in the Old Testament and our faith in the New Testament are one and the same — though they differ in their external object. This is what Peter witnesses in Acts when he says: 'What neither our fathers nor we were able to bear — we believe through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we will be saved, just as they were' (Acts 15:10-11). Paul also says: 'Our fathers all drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ' (1 Corinthians 10:4). And Christ Himself says: 'Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad' (John 8:56). Even so, the faith of the fathers was grounded in Christ who was to come, just as our faith is now grounded in Christ who has

been revealed. Abraham in his time was made righteous through faith in Christ yet to come — but if he lived today, he would be made righteous by faith in Christ already revealed and present. As I said before about Cornelius: he first believed in Christ to come, but after being instructed by Peter, he believed that Christ had already come. The difference in times does not change faith, the Holy Spirit, or His gifts. For there has been, is, and will always be one will, one purpose, and one understanding concerning Christ — in both the ancient fathers and the faithful of today and those yet to come. We too have a Christ to come and believe in Him, just as the Old Testament fathers did — for we await His return in the last day in glory to judge the living and the dead, He whom we now believe has already come for our salvation. Therefore Paul's citation offends no one except blind and ignorant critics.

Paul therefore, as I have said, rightly uses the passage from Genesis about faith in Christ when speaking of Abraham's faith. For all the promises of the past were contained in Christ who was to come. Both Abraham and the other fathers, and we as well, are made righteous by faith in Christ — they by faith in Him yet to come, we by faith in Him now present. We are dealing here with the nature and manner of justification, which is the same for both them and us — concerning Christ who was coming and Christ who has come. It is enough, then, for Paul to show that the law does not justify — only faith does, whether that faith is in Christ yet to come or in Christ who has already come.

Even today, Christ is present to some and still to come for others. To all believers He is present; to unbelievers He has not yet come and profits them nothing at all. But if they hear the Gospel

and believe that He is present for them, He justifies and saves them.

Verse 7. So then, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

It is as if Paul were saying: You know from the example of Abraham and from the plain testimony of Scripture that those who are of faith are the children of Abraham — whether they are Jews or Gentiles — without any consideration of the law, works, or physical descent from the patriarchs. For it was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith that the promise was made to Abraham: that he would be heir of the world — that is, that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and that he would be called the father of nations. And lest the Jews falsely interpret this word 'nations' as referring only to themselves, the Scripture prevents this and says not merely 'a father of nations' but 'I have made you a father of many nations' (Genesis 17:5). Abraham is therefore not only the father of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.

From this we can clearly see that the children of Abraham are not the children of the flesh but the children of faith, as Paul explains in Romans 4: Abraham 'is the father of us all, as it is written, I have made you the father of many nations — in the presence of the God in whom he believed' (Romans 4:16-17). Paul thus presents two Abrahams: a procreating Abraham and a believing Abraham. Abraham has children and is a father of many nations — where? Before God, where he believes; not before the world, where he begets. In the world he is a son of Adam — a sinner, or even

more precisely, a performer of legal righteousness living by the rule of reason, after the way of ordinary human beings. But that has no bearing on the believing Abraham.

The example of the believing Abraham therefore aligns with what Scripture declares: that we are counted righteous by faith. This argument is powerful from two directions — both from the example of Abraham and from the authority of Scripture.

Verse 8. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith...

These words continue the previous argument. It is as if Paul were saying: You Jews boast excessively about the law — you praise Moses greatly because God spoke to him in the burning bush, and so on. As the Jews would brag against us (as I have heard them do more than once): 'You Christians have apostles, a pope, and bishops — but we Jews have the patriarchs, the prophets, and God Himself, who spoke to us in the burning bush, at Sinai where He gave us the law, and in the temple.' 'Bring forward a glory and testimony to match that, if you can!' To this Paul the apostle to the Gentiles answers: 'This proud boasting of yours is worthless.' For Scripture anticipated it — foreseeing long before the law was given that the Gentiles would not be justified by the law but by the blessing promised to Abraham's seed, which was given to him, as Paul notes shortly after, 430 years before the law was given. The law, coming so many years later, could not block or cancel this promise of blessing made to Abraham — it has stood firm and will stand forever. What can the Jews say in response to this?

This argument from the chronology of events is very strong. The promise of blessing was given to Abraham 430 years before the people of Israel received the law. God said to Abraham: 'Because you believed God and gave glory to Him, you shall be a father of many nations.' There, by God's promise, Abraham was appointed the father of many nations, and the inheritance of the world for his descendants was given to him — before the law was ever proclaimed. Why then do you boast, O Galatians, that you obtain forgiveness of sins, become children of God, and receive the inheritance through the law — which came so long afterward, 430 years after the promise?

The false apostles promoted the law and its glory beyond all measure — while neglecting and despising the promise made to Abraham 430 years before the law was given. They utterly refused to acknowledge that Abraham — whom they boasted about as the father of their entire nation — was still uncircumcised and living many ages before the law when he was made righteous, and that he was made righteous by no other means than faith alone, as Scripture most plainly says: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Only afterward, once he was already counted righteous on account of his faith, does Scripture speak of circumcision — in Genesis 17: 'This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you.' With this argument Paul thoroughly defeats the false apostles and shows plainly that Abraham was justified by faith alone — without circumcision, before circumcision, and 430 years before the law. He handles this same argument in Romans 4: that righteousness was credited to

Abraham before circumcision, so that he was righteous while still uncircumcised — and therefore all the more righteous before the law existed.

Therefore, Paul says, Scripture well anticipated this proud boasting about the righteousness of the law and works — by establishing Abraham's justification before circumcision and before the law. The law was given 430 years after the promise, while Abraham was not only justified without the law and before the law existed, but had already died and been buried. And his righteousness without the law flourished not only up until the law came but will flourish to the end of the world. If then the father of the entire Jewish nation was made righteous without the law and before the law, all the more are his children made righteous by the same means their father was. Therefore righteousness comes by faith alone, and not through the law.

Verse 8. ...preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'

The Jews not only pass lightly over these remarkable sentences — 'Abraham believed God,' 'I have appointed you a father,' and similar passages which highly commend faith and contain promises of spiritual things — they openly mock them and corrupt them with wicked interpretations. For they are blind and hard-hearted, and therefore cannot see that these passages deal with faith toward God and righteousness before God. With equal malice they trifle with this significant passage about spiritual blessing: 'In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' They say that 'to bless' means nothing more than to praise, to wish prosperity, and to be celebrated before the world. On this basis they claim that the Jew born of Abraham's seed is blessed, and that the proselyte or foreigner

who worships the God of the Jews and joins himself to them is also blessed. They think 'blessing' means nothing more than worldly praise and glory — that a person may boast of belonging to Abraham's family. But this is to corrupt and distort what Scripture says, not to explain it. By the words 'Abraham believed,' Paul defines and sets before us a spiritual Abraham — faithful, righteous, and holding God's promise. This is an Abraham not living in error and the old flesh — not born of Adam, but of the Holy Spirit. It is of this Abraham, renewed by faith and born again by the Holy Spirit, that Scripture speaks when it declares he would be a father of many nations and that all the Gentiles would be given to him as an inheritance — as in: 'In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.'

Scripture therefore attributes righteousness only to the believing Abraham — and it speaks of him as he stands before God. These passages of Scripture present us with a new Abraham, separated from physical marriage and physical descent, and regarded as he is before God: believing and justified through faith, to whom God now makes this promise on account of his faith: 'You shall be a father of many nations' and 'In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' This is Paul's meaning when he shows how Scripture anticipated and exposed the vain presumption and proud boasting of the Jews about the law. For the inheritance of the Gentiles was given to Abraham not through the law and circumcision, but long before them — through the righteousness of faith alone.

Therefore, when the Jews claim to be blessed simply because they are Abraham's children and physical seed, it is nothing but empty boasting. It is indeed a great privilege and worldly honor to

be descended from Abraham, as Paul acknowledges in Romans 9 — but not so before God. The Jews therefore wickedly distort this passage about the blessing by applying it only to a physical blessing, doing great injustice to Scripture, which speaks plainly of a spiritual blessing before God and cannot and should not be understood any other way. This then is the true meaning of 'in you shall all be blessed.' In which 'you'? In you, Abraham, who believes — or in your faith, or in your seed that is to come — that is, in Christ in whom you believe. All the nations of the earth shall be blessed — meaning all nations shall be your blessed children, just as you are blessed, as it is written: 'So shall your offspring be' (Genesis 15:5).

From this it follows that Abraham's blessing and faith are the same as ours — that Abraham's Christ is our Christ — and that Christ died for Abraham's sins just as He died for ours. Abraham 'saw My day and was glad' (John 8:56). Therefore everything sounds the same note. We must not allow the word 'blessing' to be distorted. The Jews look at Scripture through a veil and therefore do not understand what the promise made to the fathers is or what it concerns — yet we must consider this above all things. When we do, we will see that God speaks to Abraham the patriarch not about the law or about things to be done, but about things to be believed — that is, God speaks to him of promises that are received by faith. What does Abraham do? He believes those promises. And what does God do for that believing Abraham? He counts his faith as righteousness, and adds still more promises: 'I am your protector' (Genesis 15:1); 'In you all nations shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:3); 'You shall be a father of many nations' (Genesis 17:5); 'So

shall your offspring be' (Genesis 15:5). These are unbreakable arguments against which nothing can be said — if the passages of Scripture are examined carefully.

Verse 9. So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

The whole weight and force lies in the words 'with faithful Abraham.' Paul draws a clear distinction between Abraham and Abraham, making two persons out of one. It is as if he were saying: there is a working Abraham and there is a believing Abraham. With the working Abraham we have nothing to do. For if he is justified by works, he has reason to boast — but not before God. Let the Jews glory as much as they like in the procreating, working, circumcised, law-keeping Abraham. But we glory in the faithful Abraham, of whom Scripture says he received the blessing of righteousness through his faith — not only for himself but for all who believe as he believed (Romans 4:3). So the world was promised to Abraham because he believed. Therefore all the world is blessed — that is, receives the imputation of righteousness — if it believes as Abraham believed.

The blessing therefore is nothing other than the promise of the Gospel. And that all nations are blessed means that all nations will hear the blessing — that is, the promise of God will be preached and published by the Gospel among all nations. The prophets drew many prophecies from this passage through spiritual understanding. As in Psalm 2:8: 'Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession.' And again in Psalm 19:4: 'Their voice goes out through all the earth.' In short, all the prophecies of Christ's kingdom and the publication of the Gospel throughout the whole world have sprung from this one

statement: 'In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' To say that the nations are blessed, then, is nothing other than saying that righteousness is freely given to them — that they are counted righteous before God, not through the law but through hearing with faith. For Abraham was justified by no other means than by hearing the word of promise, of blessing, and of grace. Just as Abraham obtained the imputation of righteousness through hearing with faith, so all the Gentiles obtained and still obtain the same. For the same word first declared to Abraham was afterward published to all the Gentiles.

From this we see that 'to bless' means nothing other than — as I said — to preach and teach the word of the Gospel, to confess Christ, and to spread the knowledge of Him among all the Gentiles. This is the office and continual sacrifice of the church's priesthood in the new covenant — distributing this blessing through preaching, through the ministry of the sacraments, through comforting the brokenhearted, and through distributing the word of grace, which Abraham had and which was his blessing. He believed it, and in believing he received the blessing. We believe the same and are therefore blessed. And this blessing is a great glory — not before the world, but before God. For we have heard that our sins are forgiven, that we are accepted by God, that God is our Father and we are His children, with whom He will not be angry — but will deliver us from sin, from death, and from all evils, and will give us righteousness, life, and eternal salvation. The prophets — as I said — preached this blessing everywhere. They did not read those promises to the fathers as carelessly as the wicked Jews, the papist Scholastics, and the sectarians of today do. Instead they read and weighed them with great care and drew

from them everything they prophesied about Christ and His kingdom. So the prophecy of Hosea 13:14 — 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?' — and similar passages from the other prophets all sprang from those promises in which God promised the fathers the crushing of the serpent's head and the blessing of all nations (Genesis 3).

Furthermore, if the nations are blessed — that is, if they are counted righteous before God — it follows that they are free from sin and death and have been made partakers of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, not for their works but for their faith in Christ. Therefore that passage from Genesis 12, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed,' is not speaking of a blessing of words — of praise and good wishes — but of the kind of blessing that belongs to the imputation of righteousness, which avails before God and redeems from the curse of sin and from all the evils that accompany it. Now this blessing is received only by faith. For the text says plainly: 'Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness.' It is therefore a purely spiritual blessing — and there is in truth no real blessing but this one, even though it is despised and cursed by the world, as indeed it is. Therefore this is a powerful passage: that those who are of faith have become partakers of this promised blessing given to the believing Abraham. By this Paul cuts off the objection of the Jews who boast of a procreating and law-keeping Abraham who is just before men — and not of the believing Abraham.

Just as the Jews glory only in a working Abraham, so the pope sets before us only a working Christ — or rather Christ as an example to imitate. He says: 'Whoever wants to live godly must walk as

Christ walked,' citing His own words in John 13: 'I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done to you.' We do not deny that the faithful ought to follow Christ's example and do good works — but we say that they are not justified before God by doing so. Paul is not discussing here what we ought to do but how we are made righteous. In this matter we must set nothing before our eyes except Jesus Christ dying for our sins and rising for our justification — and we must take hold of Him by faith as a gift, not as an example. Reason does not understand this; and so just as the Jews follow a working Abraham instead of a believing one, the papists and all who seek righteousness by works look not to a justifying Christ but to a working Christ — and in doing so they turn away from Christ, from righteousness, and from salvation. And just as the Jews who were saved were to follow the believing Abraham, so we also, if we want to be delivered from sin and saved, must take hold of the justifying and saving Christ — whom Abraham himself also laid hold of by faith and through whom he was blessed.

It was indeed a great glory that Abraham received circumcision at God's command, that he was endowed with excellent virtues, and that he obeyed God in all things. It is also a great honor to follow the example of Christ in action — to love your neighbor, to do good to those who harm you, to pray for your enemies, and to bear patiently with those who repay good with evil. But none of this avails anything for righteousness before God. The excellent deeds and virtues of Abraham were not what caused him to be counted righteous before God. Similarly, imitating and following the example of Christ does not make us righteous before God. To make us righteous before God requires a far more excellent price — one

that is neither the righteousness of man nor the righteousness of the law. Here we need Christ to bless us and save us, just as Abraham needed Him as his blesser and Savior. How? Not by works, but by faith. Therefore, just as the believing Abraham is something entirely different from the working Abraham, so Christ as blesser and redeemer is something entirely different from Christ as example and worker. Paul here speaks of Christ redeeming and Abraham believing — not of Christ giving an example or Abraham performing works. Therefore he adds deliberately and with great force: 'those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.'

We must therefore separate the believing Abraham from the working Abraham as far as heaven is from earth. A person who believes in Christ is altogether a divine person — a child of God, an heir of the world, a conqueror of sin, death, the world, and the devil — and cannot be praised or magnified enough. Let us not leave this faithful Abraham buried in his grave, as he is buried to the Jews, but let us highly honor and magnify him and fill heaven and earth with his name — so that in the light of this faithful Abraham, we see the working Abraham as nothing at all. For when we speak of the faithful Abraham, we are in heaven. But when we afterward do the things that the working Abraham did — which were earthly and human, not divine and heavenly, except insofar as God assigned them — we are among ordinary people on earth. The believing Abraham therefore fills both heaven and earth. So every Christian through his faith fills heaven and earth, so that beyond it he ought to behold nothing.

Now Paul draws an opposing argument from the word 'shall be blessed.' Scripture is filled with contrasting relationships and contrary opposites. It is a mark of skill to recognize these kinds of

speech in Scripture and to use them to interpret its statements — as here, the word 'blessing' immediately implies its opposite: curse. For when Scripture says that all nations are blessed through faith, or together with the faithful Abraham, it necessarily follows that all — both Jews and Gentiles — are cursed apart from faith, or apart from the believing Abraham. The promise of blessing was given to Abraham, that in him all nations would be blessed. No blessing, then, is to be found except in the promise given to Abraham, now published by the Gospel throughout the whole world. Whatever is apart from that blessing is therefore under a curse. And this is what Paul shows plainly when he says:

Verse 10. For all who rely on the works of the Law are under a curse.

Here you see that the curse is like a flood sweeping over everything that is outside of Abraham — that is, outside of faith and outside of the promised blessing of Abraham. Now, if the very law given by Moses at God's command brings those under it under a curse, how much more do the laws and traditions invented by human minds do the same? Whoever wants to escape the curse must therefore take hold of the promise of blessing — of the faith of Abraham — otherwise he will remain under the curse. From the words 'shall be blessed in you' it therefore follows that all nations — whether they lived before Abraham, in his time, or after him — are cursed and will remain under the curse forever, unless they are blessed through Abraham's faith, to whom the promise of blessing was given to be spread by his seed throughout the whole world.

Knowing these things is very necessary, for they greatly help to comfort troubled and afflicted consciences — and they also teach us to distinguish the righteousness of faith from the righteousness

of the flesh, or civil righteousness. We must note that Paul is not dealing here with a matter of civil policy but with a divine and spiritual matter before God — lest any reckless person accuse him of cursing and condemning civil laws and magistrates. At this point all the sophists and papist Scholastics are silenced and have nothing to say. Readers must therefore be warned: this passage deals with nothing relating to civil laws or to behavior and political affairs (which are God's ordinances and good things, commended elsewhere in Scripture), but with a spiritual righteousness by which we are justified before God and called His children in the kingdom of heaven. In short, nothing here concerns bodily life but only eternal life, where no blessing is to be hoped for and no righteousness is to be sought through the law, through traditions, or through anything that can be named in this life — apart from the promise of Abraham's blessing. Let civil laws and ordinances remain in their rightful place. Let the magistrate make excellent laws — yet they deliver no one from the curse of God's law. The kingdom of Babylon, ordained by God and entrusted to kings, had excellent laws, and all nations were commanded to obey them — yet this obedience to its laws did not save it from the curse of God's law. In the same way, we obey the laws of princes and magistrates, but we are not made righteous before God by doing so — for we are in an entirely different matter here.

It is not without reason that I press this distinction so earnestly — it is very necessary to understand it. Yet very few people actually notice it and grasp it. It is all too easy to confuse and blend together heavenly righteousness and civil righteousness. In civil righteousness we must pay attention to laws and works. But in spiritual, divine, and heavenly righteousness we must completely

set aside all laws and works, and keep only the promise and blessing before our eyes — which sets before us Christ, the giver of this blessing and of grace, our only Savior. This spiritual righteousness, then, excluding the law and all works, looks only to the grace and blessing given by Christ — as it was promised to Abraham and believed by him.

From this we can plainly see that this argument is unbreakable. For if we must receive this blessing through Christ alone, it necessarily follows from the opposite that it is not received through the law. The blessing was given to the believing Abraham before the law and without the law. Just as Abraham believed in Christ who was to come as the giver of the blessing, so we believe by the same faith in Christ who has come — and in this way we are now justified by faith, just as Abraham was then justified by faith. Those who are under the law are therefore not blessed but remain under the curse.

This the pope and his proud prelates neither believe nor can tolerate — nor can they endure this teaching. Yet we must not stay silent but must confess the truth and say that the papacy is under a curse — indeed that all the laws and civil ordinances of the Emperor are under a curse, because as Paul teaches, everything outside the promise and faith of Abraham is under the curse. When our opponents hear this, they immediately twist and slander our words, as though we were teaching that magistrates should not be honored, that we are stirring up rebellion against the Emperor, condemning all laws, and overturning civil society. But they do us great injustice. We make a distinction between the physical blessing and the spiritual blessing. We say that the Emperor is blessed with a physical blessing — for to have a kingdom, laws, civil order,

a wife, children, house, and land is a blessing, since all these things are good gifts and creatures of God. But this physical blessing, which is temporary and will come to an end, does not deliver us from the eternal curse. Therefore we do not condemn laws, nor do we stir up rebellion against the Emperor — we teach that he must be obeyed, feared, respected, and honored, but in the civil realm. But when we speak of blessing in the theological sense, we say boldly with Paul that everything outside the faith and promise of Abraham is under the curse and remains under that heavenly and eternal condemnation. For there we must look for another life after this one, and another blessing beyond this physical one.

In conclusion: all physical things are good creatures of God. Therefore — as I have said — to have a wife, children, and goods, to have civil laws and social order, are good blessings from God in their proper place — that is, temporal blessings belonging to this present life. But those who seek justification through law-keeping at every age — Jews, papists, sectarians, and the like — confuse and blend these two kinds of blessing together. They make no distinction between physical blessings and spiritual ones. They say: 'We have a law, and this law is good, holy, and righteous — therefore we are justified through it.' Who denies that the law is good, holy, and righteous? And yet it is also the law of condemnation, of sin, of wrath, and of death. Therefore we make a distinction here between the physical and spiritual blessing, saying that God has a twofold blessing: one physical, for this life, and one spiritual, for eternal life. To have wealth, children, and the like is a blessing — but only in its proper degree, that is, in this present life. As for eternal life, physical blessings are not enough — for the wicked actually have the most of them. Civil righteousness and the right-

eousness of the law are not sufficient either — for the wicked flourish in these most of all. God distributes these things freely throughout the world, giving them to both the good and the bad — just as He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous — for He is generous to all. It is a small thing for Him to place all created things at the feet of the wicked. 'The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will' (Romans 8:20). Therefore those who have only these physical blessings are not children of God, not spiritually blessed before God as Abraham was — but are under the curse, as Paul says here: whoever is of the works of the law is under the curse.

Paul could have stated this as a general proposition: 'Whatever is without faith is under the curse.' He does not do this — instead he takes what is, apart from faith, the best, greatest, and most excellent among all the physical blessings of the world: namely, the law of God. 'That law,' he says, 'is indeed holy and given by God — and yet it does nothing but place all people under the curse and keep them there.' Now if the law of God itself places people under the curse, how much more do all lesser laws and blessings do the same? And to make it clear what Paul means by being under the curse, he explains it through this testimony of Scripture:

Verse 10. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' (Deuteronomy 27:26).

Paul uses this testimony from Deuteronomy 27 to prove that all who are under the law or who are of the works of the law are under the curse — that is, under sin, God's wrath, and eternal death. For he is speaking, as I noted before, not of a physical but of a spiritual curse, which must necessarily be the curse of eternal

death and hell fire. And this is a remarkable form of proof. Paul proves this positive statement — 'whoever is of the works of the law is under the curse' — by means of this negative statement from Moses: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things.' Now these two statements — Paul's and Moses' — appear to be directly opposite. Paul says: whoever does the works of the law is under the curse. Moses says: whoever does not do the works of the law is under the curse. How can these two statements be reconciled? And even more: how can one prove the other? Indeed no one can understand this passage well unless he also knows and understands the article of justification.

Paul had undoubtedly explained this at greater length when he was among the Galatians in person — otherwise they could not have followed his argument here, where he only touches on it briefly. But because they had already heard him explain it before, being reminded here they could recall it. These two statements are not contradictory — they fit together very well. We teach the same thing: 'It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified' (Romans 2:13). And at the same time: 'Those who are of the works of the law are under the curse.' For the article of justification teaches that whatever is outside the faith of Abraham is under the curse — and yet 'the righteous requirement of the law' must be fulfilled in us (Romans 8:4). To someone ignorant of the teaching of faith, these two statements seem entirely contradictory.

Above all things, then, we must carefully observe what Paul is addressing in this passage, what his aim is, and how he looks at Moses. He is here — as I have said many times — in a spiritual matter, entirely separate from politics and from all civil laws, and

he looks at Moses with different eyes than the hypocrites and false apostles do, reading the law spiritually. Therefore the entire point of the matter rests on the word 'to do.' Now, to do the law means not merely to perform it outwardly, but to perform it truly and perfectly. There are two kinds of 'doers' of the law. The first are those who are of the works of the law — the very people Paul is arguing against throughout this entire letter. The second kind are those who are of faith, about whom we will speak further on. Now, to be of the law or of the works of the law, and to be of faith, are completely opposite — as opposite as God and the devil, sin and righteousness, death and life. Those who are of the law seek to be made righteous through the law. Those who are of faith trust with certainty that they are made righteous through mercy alone for Christ's sake. Whoever says that righteousness is of faith condemns and curses the righteousness of works. And conversely, whoever says that righteousness is of the law condemns and curses the righteousness of faith. They are therefore completely opposed to one another.

Whoever understands this will easily see that to fulfill the law is not to do what the law commands in outward appearance only — as the hypocrites imagine — but to do it in spirit: that is, truly and perfectly. But where are we to find the person who fulfills it this way? Let us see such a person and we will praise him. Our opponents have their ready answer: 'the doers of the law will be justified' (Romans 2:13). Very well. But let us first define who these doers of the law are. Our opponents call a doer of the law someone who performs the works of the law and is thereby made righteous by those works done before grace. But this is not what 'doing the law' means for Paul — for as I have said, to be of the works of the

law and to be of faith are opposite things. Therefore to seek to be justified by the works of the law is to deny the righteousness of faith. So these law-workers, when they perform the law, in doing so are actually denying the righteousness of faith and sinning against the first, second, and third commandments — indeed against the whole law. For God commands that we worship Him in faith and in the fear of His name. These people, by contrast, manufacture a righteousness of works without faith and against faith — and therefore in performing the law, they do the opposite of what the law requires and commit deadly sin. They deny the righteousness of God, His mercy, and His promises. They deny Christ and all His benefits. And in their hearts they establish not the righteousness of the law — which they neither understand nor actually keep — but a mere fantasy and idol of the law. We must therefore say that in performing the law they not only fail to fulfill it, but also sin and deny God's majesty in all His promises. This is not the purpose for which the law was given.

Not understanding the law, they abuse it. As Paul says: 'Being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness' (Romans 10:3). They are blind — they do not know how to think rightly about faith and the promises. So without any real understanding they rush into Scripture and grab hold of only one part of it — the law — and imagine they can fulfill it by their works. But this is pure delusion, a bewitching and illusion of the heart. That so-called righteousness of the law which they think they are fulfilling is in reality nothing other than idolatry and blasphemy against God. It is inevitable, therefore, that they remain under the curse.

It is impossible for us to do the law in the way they imagine — much less to be justified by it. The law itself demonstrates this, for it produces the opposite effect: it increases sin, it produces wrath, it accuses, it terrifies, and it condemns. How then could it justify? The promise also confirms the same. For God said to Abraham: 'In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' There is no blessing therefore except in Abraham's promise — and if you are outside that promise, you are under the curse. And if you are under the curse, you do not fulfill the law, because you are under sin, the devil, and eternal death — all of which certainly follow from the curse. In conclusion: if righteousness came through the law, then God's promise would be empty, and He would have poured out His blessing so abundantly for nothing. Therefore, when God saw that we could not fulfill the law, He made provision for this long before the law — promising the blessing to Abraham: 'In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' So He made clear that all nations would be blessed not through the law but through the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 17). Those who cling to the law and seek justification through it, despising the promise, are under the curse.

Therefore, 'to do' the law means, first of all, to believe — and then through faith to fulfill the law. We must first receive the Holy Spirit, and being enlightened and made new creatures by Him, we then begin to do the law — that is, to love God and our neighbor. But the Holy Spirit is not received through the law (for as Paul says, those who are under the law are under the curse) — but through hearing with faith, that is, through the promise. We must first be blessed together with Abraham, in the promise made to him and in his faith. Therefore above all things we must hear and

receive the promise, which presents Christ and offers Him to all believers. When they take hold of Him by faith, the Holy Spirit is then given to them for His sake. Then they love God and their neighbor, then they do good works and bear the cross with patience. This is truly and genuinely doing the law — otherwise the law remains always unfullfiled. Therefore, if you want to define truly and plainly what it is to do the law, it is this: to believe in Jesus Christ, and then — once the Holy Spirit has been received through faith in Christ — to do what the law commands. Apart from this we are not able to fulfill the law. For Scripture shows that there is no blessing without the promise — not even in the law. It is therefore impossible to fulfill the law without the promise, for the blessing must accompany everything — the preaching and proclaiming of Christ, who was promised to Abraham so that the world would be blessed through Him. Otherwise we will never fulfill the law.

There is therefore not a single person in the whole world who deserves the title 'doer of the law' apart from the promise of the Gospel. The term 'doer of the law' is therefore an empty title — no one truly understands what it means unless he stands outside and above the law in the blessing and faith of Abraham. The true doer of the law, then, is the one who, having received the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, begins to love God and to do good to his neighbor. So the word 'to do the law' must include faith — which makes the tree. Once the tree exists, the fruit follows. The tree must come first, and then the fruit. Apples do not make the tree; the tree makes the apples. So faith first makes the person — who then brings forth works. Therefore to do the law without faith is like carving apples out of wood and clay without any tree — that is

not making apples but only imitations. By contrast, if the tree exists — that is, if the person has been made a doer through faith in Christ — works will follow. For the doer must come before the deeds, not the deeds before the doer.

The doer, therefore, is not called a doer because of deeds already done, but because of the deeds that will follow. For Christians are not made righteous by doing righteous things — rather, having already been made righteous by faith in Christ, they then do righteous things. In ordinary human affairs, the doer is made by what he does — a person becomes a carpenter by practicing carpentry. But in divine matters, people are not made workers by prior works; instead, persons already formed and shaped by faith in Christ become doers and workers. It is of such people that Paul speaks when he says: 'The doers of the law shall be justified' — that is, shall be counted righteous.

Indeed the sophists and papist Scholastics are themselves compelled to admit — and actually teach — that a moral work done outwardly, if it is not done with a pure heart, a right will, and true intent, is mere hypocrisy. Hence the German proverb: 'Such a robe covers many a rogue.' The vilest and most wicked person in the world can copy the very same outward works that a godly person does by faith. Judas did the same works that the other apostles did. What was wrong with the works of Judas, since he performed the very same deeds as the other apostles? Note what the sophist answers from his moral philosophy: 'Although he did the same works as the other apostles, the person was reprobate and his judgment perverse — therefore his works were hypocritical and not genuine, however similar they looked on the outside.' So they are compelled to admit that even in civil and external matters,

works do not justify unless they are accompanied by a right heart, will, and judgment. How much more are they forced to admit the same in spiritual matters, where above all things there must be a knowledge of God and a faith that purifies the heart? They walk in works and in the righteousness of the law as Judas walked in the works of the apostles — not understanding what they say or what they affirm. And although Paul says plainly everywhere that the law does not justify but produces wrath, exposes sin, reveals God's anger and judgment, and threatens eternal death — when they read these things they do not see them, much less understand them. They do not even deserve to be called hypocrites — they are the masks and shadows of disguised hypocrites, miserably bewitched, dreaming that they are made righteous by the works of the law. Therefore, as I have said, the term 'doer of the law' as they define it is a mere fabrication — a monster — found nowhere in reality.

Therefore when Paul proves the statement 'whoever is of the works of the law is under the curse' by citing Moses — 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in this book' — he is not proving one contrary by another, as it might first appear. He is proving it rightly and in correct order. For Moses means and teaches the very same thing as Paul: 'Cursed is everyone who does not do all things' — and no one does them. Therefore whoever is of the works of the law does not keep the law. And if they do not keep it, they are under the curse. But since there are two kinds of doers of the law — as I said — true doers and hypocrites, the true doers must be distinguished from the hypocrites. The true doers of the law are those who through faith are the good tree before the fruit — doers and workers before the works. Moses also is speaking of

these — and unless people are of this kind, they are under the curse. But hypocrites are not of this kind. They hold the view that they will attain righteousness through their works and thereby make the person righteous and acceptable to God. Their reasoning is: 'We who are sinners and unrighteous will be made righteous.' 'How?' 'By good works.' They therefore act like a foolish builder who tries to build from the roof down to the foundation — from the fruits to make the tree. For by seeking to be justified by works, they try to make the worker out of the works — which is directly contrary to Moses, who subjects such a person to the curse just as Paul does. And so, in their attempt to do the law, they not only fail to do it but also deny — as I have said — the first commandment, the promises of God, and the promised blessing of Abraham. They renounce faith and set out to make themselves blessed by their own works — to make themselves righteous, to deliver themselves from sin and death, to overcome the devil, and to seize the kingdom of heaven by sheer effort. This is plainly to renounce God and to put themselves in God's place. For all of these things are the works of divine majesty alone — not of any creature in heaven or on earth.

From this Paul could easily predict, on the basis of the first commandment, the abominations that Antichrist would bring into the church. For all who teach that any worship is necessary for salvation beyond what God requires in the first commandment — the fear of God, faith, and the love of God — are outright antichrists who put themselves in the place of God. Christ Himself foretold that such people would come, saying in Matthew 24: 'Many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ.' We today can also boldly and with certainty declare that whoever seeks righteousness

through works without faith denies God and makes himself God. For this is what he thinks: 'If I do this work, I will be righteous; I will conquer sin, death, the devil, God's wrath, and hell, and I will obtain eternal life.' And what is this, I ask, but to claim for oneself the very work that belongs to God alone — and to show in action that one considers himself to be God? Therefore it is simple for us to prophesy and to judge with complete certainty of all those who are without faith: they are not only idolaters but actual idols themselves, who deny God and put themselves in His place. On this same foundation Peter also prophesies: 'There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master ... and in their greed they will exploit you with false words' (2 Peter 2:1-3).

All the prophecies against idolatry in the Old Testament sprang from the first commandment. For all the wicked kings and false prophets, along with all the unfaithful people, did nothing other than what the pope and all hypocrites always do. They despised the first commandment and the worship God had appointed, and they rejected the promise of Abraham's seed — the very seed in whom all nations would be blessed and sanctified. In its place they set up a corrupt worship entirely contrary to God's word and said: 'With this worship we will serve God and declare His praise — He who brought us out of the land of Egypt.' So Jeroboam made two golden calves and said: 'Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt' (1 Kings 12:28). He said this of the true God who had redeemed Israel — and yet both he and all the people were idolaters, for they worshipped God contrary to the first commandment. They focused only on the outward act — and having performed it, they counted themselves righteous before

God. And what was this but to deny God Himself — the very God they confessed with their lips when they said He had brought them out of Egypt? Paul speaks of such idolaters when he says: 'They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their deeds' (Titus 1:16).

All hypocrites and idolaters, therefore, go about to do the very works that properly belong to divine majesty — works that belong to Christ alone. They do not say in plain words 'I am God' or 'I am Christ.' And yet in practice they arrogantly claim for themselves the divinity and office of Christ — which amounts to the same thing as saying: 'I am Christ; I am a savior — not only of myself but of others as well.' This is what the monks not only taught but persuaded the whole world to believe: that through their hypocritical holiness they could make not only themselves righteous but also others who shared in it. And yet it is the sole and unique office of Christ to justify the sinner. The pope in the same way, by spreading his own kind of 'divinity' throughout the whole world, has denied and completely buried the office and divinity of Christ.

These things need to be taught and weighed carefully, for they teach us to judge the whole of Christian doctrine and of human life — to strengthen people's consciences, to understand all prophecy and all of Scripture, and to judge rightly about everything else. Whoever understands all of this rightly can say with certainty that the pope is Antichrist, because he teaches an entirely different kind of worship from what the first table of the law sets out. He can fully understand what it means to deny God, to deny Christ, and what Christ means when He says 'Many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ' (Matthew 24:5). He understands what it means 'to be against God and to exalt oneself above every-

thing called God or worshipped' (2 Thessalonians 2:4), what it signifies that 'Antichrist sits in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God,' what it means 'to see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place' (Matthew 24:15), and so on.

All of these evils spring from this: that this accursed hypocrisy refuses to be made righteous by the divine blessing or to be created anew by God the Creator. It will not be passive — will not allow anything to be worked in it. Instead it insists on being entirely the one who acts, doing those things that it ought to let God work in it and receive from Him. Therefore it makes itself creator and justifier through its own works, despising the blessing promised and given to Abraham and his believing children. So every hypocrite is at once both the raw material and the finished work — though this is contrary to all reason, since one and the same thing cannot work upon itself. He is the material because he is a sinner; he is the worker because he puts on a robe, or chooses some other work through which he hopes to earn grace and save himself and others. So he is both the creature and the creator. Therefore no words can express how execrable and horrible it is to seek righteousness through the law or through works, without the blessing. For it is the abomination standing in the holy place, which denies God and sets the creature in the Creator's place.

The doers of the law, therefore, are not the hypocrites who perform the law outwardly — but the true believers, who having received the Holy Spirit actually fulfill the law, that is, love God and their neighbor. A true doer of the law, then, is to be understood not in terms of the works he performs but in terms of the person who has been reborn through faith. For according to the Gospel, those who are made righteous then do righteous things — but according

to ordinary human logic it works the opposite way: those who do righteous things are made righteous. Therefore, being justified by faith, we then do good works, through which — as 2 Peter 1:10 says — our calling and election is confirmed and made more certain day by day. But because we have only the first fruits of the Spirit, and not yet the fullness, and the remnants of sin still remain in us — we do not keep the law perfectly. But this imperfection is not counted against those of us who believe in Christ, who was promised to Abraham and has blessed us. For in the meantime we are tenderly nurtured and cared for in the lap of God's patience, for Christ's sake. We are like that wounded man who fell into the hands of robbers — whose wounds the Samaritan bound up, pouring in oil and wine, and then set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn, made provision for him, and on departing said to the innkeeper: 'Take care of him' (Luke 10:30-35). So we in the meantime are cared for as guests in an inn, until the Lord reaches out His hand a second time — as Isaiah says — to deliver us fully.

Therefore Moses's statement — 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in this book' — is not opposed to Paul, who declares all those under the curse who are of the works of the law. For Moses requires a doer who can perform the law perfectly. But where shall we find such a person? Nowhere. For Moses himself confesses he is not such a person — for he says in Exodus 34 that no one is innocent before God. And David says: 'Lord, do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no living person is righteous in Your sight' (Psalm 143:2). And Paul says: 'For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do' (Romans 7:15). Therefore Moses, together with Paul, necessarily drives us to Christ, through whom we are made true doers of the law and are

not held guilty of any transgression. How? First, through the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness, on account of our faith in Christ. Second, through the gift of God and the Holy Spirit, who produces new life and new desires in us, so that we may also begin to fulfill the law in practice. And whatever is not yet done is pardoned for Christ's sake — and whatever sin still remains in us is not counted against us. So Moses agrees with Paul and means the very same thing when he says: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide' — for he says they do not fulfill the law because they are trying to make themselves righteous by works, and he concludes with Paul that they are under the curse. Moses therefore requires true doers of the law who are of faith, just as Paul condemns those who are not true doers of the law — that is, those who are not of faith. There is no contradiction in Moses speaking negatively and Paul speaking positively — so long as you define correctly what is meant by the word 'do.' Both statements are true: that all are cursed who do not abide by all things written in this book, and that all are cursed who are of the works of the law.

An Answer to Those Arguments Which the Adversaries Allege Against the Doctrine and Righteousness of Faith

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Since this passage gives us the opportunity, we must say something about the arguments our opponents bring against the teaching of faith — namely, that we are made righteous by faith alone. There are many passages in both the Old and New Testaments concerning works and the rewards of works, which our opponents cite and think they can use to overturn the teaching of faith that we teach and defend. We must therefore be well equipped and prepared so that we can not only instruct our fellow believers but also answer these objections.

The Scholastics and all who do not understand the article of justification know no righteousness other than civil righteousness and the righteousness of the law — which the Gentiles in a general way also understand. From the law and from moral philosophy they borrow certain terms such as 'to do' and 'to work,' and apply them to spiritual matters — which they do in the most perverse and harmful way. We must take great care to distinguish between Christian theology and human philosophy. The Scholastics them-

selves grant and teach that in the natural order, being comes before doing — the tree exists before the fruit. They also grant that a morally performed work is not truly good unless it is preceded by sound reason and a right will or good intention. So they require a right judgment of reason and a good intention to come before the work — that is, they acknowledge that the person must be morally upright before the work. Yet in theology and spiritual matters — where this principle should apply most of all — they are so dull and thick-headed that they reverse everything entirely, placing the work before reason and the good intention.

Therefore the word 'doing' means one thing in nature, another in moral philosophy, and another in theology. In nature the tree must exist first, and then the fruit. In moral philosophy, doing requires a good intention and sound reason as its foundation — and here all the philosophers stop and go no further. Therefore the theologians say that moral philosophy does not have God as its object and final end. For Aristotle, a Sadducee, or any person of civic decency calls it a right reason and a good intention if one seeks the public benefit of the community, and its peace and order. A philosopher or law-worker rises no higher than this. He does not think that through right reason and a good intention he will obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life — as the sophist or the monk does. Therefore the pagan philosopher is much better than such a hypocrite. For the philosopher stays within his proper limits — considering only the honesty and peace of the civil community — without mixing heavenly and earthly things. The sophist, by contrast, imagines that God regards his good intentions and works.

Therefore he mixes earthly and heavenly things together and abuses God's name. And this idea he takes from moral philosophy — except that he misuses it far worse than the pagan ever did.

We Christians must therefore rise higher than nature and philosophy with this word 'doing' — so that it is made entirely new, joined with a right judgment of reason and a good will, not morally but divinely. This means: knowing and believing by the word of the Gospel that God has sent His Son into the world to redeem us from sin and death. Here 'doing' is an entirely new thing — unknown to reason, to philosophers, to law-workers, and to all people, for it is 'wisdom hidden in a mystery' (1 Corinthians 2:7). Therefore in theology the work necessarily requires faith to precede it.

Therefore when our opponents cite passages of Scripture about the law and works — where the terms 'working' and 'doing' appear — you must answer them that these are theological terms, not natural or moral ones. If they are applied to natural or moral matters, they may be taken in their ordinary sense. But when they are applied to theological matters, they must include such a right reason and good will as is beyond human reason's comprehension. Therefore 'doing' in theology must always be understood as faithful doing. This faithful doing is a completely new realm — entirely separate from natural or moral doing. Therefore when we theologians speak of doing, we must necessarily mean that faithful doing, for in theology we have no right reason or good will or intention apart from faith.

This principle is well illustrated in Hebrews 11, where many works of the saints from Scripture are cited. Among them is David, who killed a lion and a bear and struck down Goliath. The sophist or Scholastic — that foolish observer — looks at nothing but the

outward appearance of the act, as an ox stares at a new gate. But the work of David must be examined by first looking at what kind of person David was before he did this deed. Then you will see that he was a person whose heart trusted in the Lord God of Israel — as the text plainly shows: 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine' (1 Samuel 17:37). And again: 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand... for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hand' (1 Samuel 17:45-47). You see then that David was a righteous man, accepted by God, and strong and constant in faith before he performed this deed. David's doing, therefore, is not a natural or moral doing but a faithful doing.

The same principle applies to Abel, as the same letter says: 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain' (Hebrews 11:4). If the Scholastics encounter this passage as it appears in Genesis — where both Cain and Abel offered their gifts and the Lord regarded Abel and his offerings — they immediately seize on these words: 'They offered their gifts to the Lord; the Lord had respect to the offerings of Abel.' And they cry out: 'Here you see that God regarded the offerings — therefore works justify!' These blind people treat righteousness as if it were a purely moral matter, looking only at the outward appearance of the work rather than at the heart of the one who does it — even though even in philosophy they are forced to look not just at the bare act but at the good will of the doer. And yet here they focus entirely on the words 'they offered gifts' and 'the Lord had regard to Abel and his offer-

ings,' while failing to see that the text of Genesis plainly says the Lord first regarded the person of Abel, who was pleasing to God because of his faith, and only then his offerings. In theology, therefore, we speak of faithful works, sacrifices, offerings, and gifts — that is, works that are offered and done in faith, as the letter to the Hebrews declares: 'By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice; by faith Enoch was taken up; by faith Abraham obeyed God' (Hebrews 11:4-8). We have a clear rule laid out for us in Hebrews 11 for answering every objection our opponents raise about the law and works — simply say: this person did this deed in faith. With this answer you resolve all their arguments and silence them with nothing left to reply.

From this it is abundantly clear that in theology and in matters of God, the work is worthless without faith — you must have faith before you begin to work. For 'without faith it is impossible to please God; and whoever would draw near to God must believe' (Hebrews 11:6). This is why in Hebrews the sacrifice of Abel is said to be better than the sacrifice of Cain — because Abel believed, and therefore his work or sacrifice was a faithful one. Cain, by contrast, was wicked and hypocritical — he had no faith or trust in God's grace and favor, only the presumption of his own righteousness. Therefore his work, by which he aimed to please God, was hypocritical and faithless. Even our opponents are therefore compelled to grant that in all the works of the saints, faith is presupposed — and it is on account of that faith that their works please God and are accepted by Him. In theology, therefore, there is a new kind of doing, entirely unlike the moral doing.

We also commonly distinguish faith in this way: faith is sometimes spoken of without the accompanying work, and sometimes together with the work. Just as a craftsman speaks differently depending on the material he is working with, and a gardener speaks differently of a barren tree versus a fruitful one, so the Holy Spirit speaks of faith in Scripture in different ways — sometimes of faith absolutely, and sometimes of faith in its compound or 'incarnate' form. Absolute faith is what Scripture describes when it speaks simply of justification or of those who are justified — as in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians. But when Scripture speaks of rewards and works, it speaks of the compound or incarnate faith — faith at work. Some examples of this kind of faith: 'faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6); 'Do this and you will live' (Luke 10:28); 'If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17); 'The one who does these things will live by them' (Romans 10:5); 'Turn away from evil and do good' (Psalm 34:14). In all these passages and similar ones throughout Scripture, wherever doing is mentioned, Scripture is always speaking of faithful doing. When it says 'Do this and you will live,' it means: 'First see that you have faith, that you have a right mind and a right will — that is, faith in Christ. Once you have this faith, then work on, with God's blessing.'

Is it any wonder, then, that rewards are promised to this incarnate faith — that is, to working faith, like the faith of Abel, or to faithful works? And why should Holy Scripture not speak in different ways about faith, just as it speaks in different ways about Christ as God and man — sometimes of His whole person, sometimes of His two natures separately, whether His divine nature or His human nature? When it speaks of the natures separately, it

speaks of Christ in an absolute sense; but when it speaks of the divine nature united in one person with the human nature, it speaks of Christ in His compound, incarnate form. Among the Scholastics there is a well-known rule about the communication of attributes — where the properties belonging to Christ's divinity are attributed to His humanity — and this can be seen throughout Scripture. So in Luke 2, the angel calls the infant born of the virgin Mary the Savior of all people and the Lord of both angels and men. And in Luke 1, He is called the Son of God. I can therefore truthfully say that the infant lying in the manger in the virgin's arms created heaven and earth and is Lord of the angels. Here I am speaking of a man — but in this statement 'man' is being used in a new way, referring back to the divinity — meaning: this God who has become man has created all things. Creation belongs to Christ's divinity alone; the humanity does not create. And yet it is entirely correct to say 'the man created,' because the divinity, which alone creates, is incarnate with the humanity — and therefore the humanity, together with the divinity, shares in those divine properties. Therefore it is completely right and godly to say: 'This man Jesus Christ led Israel out of Egypt, struck Pharaoh, and worked all the wonders from the beginning of the world.'

Therefore when Scripture says 'If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17) or 'Do this and you will live' (Luke 10:28), we must first ask what kind of keeping and doing is meant. For in these and similar passages — as I said — Scripture is speaking of compound faith, not of naked and simple faith. And the meaning of 'Do this and you will live' is this: you will live on account of this faithful doing, or this doing will give you life — and it does so because of your faith alone. In this way justifica-

tion is attributed to faith alone, just as creation is attributed to the divinity. And yet, just as it is truly said that Jesus the Son of Mary created all things, so justification may be attributed to incarnate faith — to faithful doing. Therefore we must never think, as the sophists and hypocrites do, that works justify in an absolute sense or that rewards are promised to moral works. Rewards are promised only to faithful works.

Let us therefore allow the Holy Spirit to speak as He does in Scripture — sometimes of naked, simple, and absolute faith, and sometimes of compound and incarnate faith. Everything that is attributed to works properly belongs to faith. For works must not be looked at through moral eyes but through the eyes of faith and the Spirit. Faith is the divinity of works — spread throughout the works of the faithful just as the divinity is spread throughout the humanity of Christ. Faith, if I may say so, is the one who does it all in faithful works. Abraham is called faithful because faith pervades the whole person of Abraham — so that when I look at him working, I see not the physical or the working Abraham, but the believing Abraham.

Therefore when you read in Scripture how the fathers, prophets, and kings worked righteousness, raised the dead, and overcame kingdoms, you must remember that such statements must be explained as the letter to the Hebrews explains them: 'By faith they worked righteousness; by faith they raised the dead; by faith they overcame kings and kingdoms' (Hebrews 11:33-35). So faith incorporates the work and gives it its perfection. Our opponents, if they are being reasonable, cannot deny this — and they have no real objection to raise against it. They may cry out that Scripture often speaks of doing and walking. We always answer: it

also speaks of faithful doing. For reason must first be enlightened by faith before it can work rightly. Once it has a true knowledge and understanding of God, the work is then incorporated into that faith — so that whatever is attributed to faith is afterward attributed to works as well, but only because of faith alone.

Therefore in reading Scripture we must learn to distinguish between the true and the hypocritical — the moral and the spiritual — doing of the law. This will enable us to declare the true meaning of all those passages that appear to uphold the righteousness of works. Now, the true doing of the law is a faithful and spiritual doing — which the person who seeks righteousness by works does not have. Therefore every self-styled doer of the law and every holy moral performer is under the curse. For he walks in presumption of his own righteousness against God, seeking to be justified by human free will and reason — and so in performing the law, he does not actually do it. This is what it means, according to Paul, to be under the works of the law: that hypocrites perform the law, and yet in performing it they do not actually do it — for they understand the word 'doing' according to the law's literal surface, which in true Christian theology is worthless. They do many things, but in the presumption of their own righteousness, without the knowledge of God and without faith — as the Pharisee did in Luke 18, and as Paul did before his conversion. Therefore they are blind, miserably in error, and remain under the curse.

Again I remind you: passages that our opponents cite from Scripture concerning works and their rewards must be interpreted spiritually. If they cite Daniel 4:27 — 'Redeem your sins with acts of righteousness and your iniquities with mercy to the oppressed' — do not interpret this in a moral sense but in the spirit of the

Gospel. Then you will see that the word 'redeem' points not to a moral doing but a spiritual one — that is, it includes faith. For in Scripture, a work — as I have said — also requires a right will and a right judgment of reason to precede it, not a moral judgment as our opponents would have it, but a divine and spiritual one, which is faith. By this means you will be able to silence these persistent sophists. They themselves are compelled to grant — and indeed teach from Aristotle — that every good work proceeds from a person's choice or will. If this is true in philosophy, how much more must a right will and sound judgment guided by faith precede the work in theology and divine matters? This is what all imperative words — all commanding words — and all words that teach the law mean in Scripture, as the letter to the Hebrews makes plain: 'By faith Abel offered...'

Now, even granting that this answer is not sufficient — though in fact it is most certain and sure — let this still stand as the argument of all arguments, the supreme standard for every Christian to hold before them against all temptations and objections, whether from opponents or from the devil himself: to take hold of and cling to the one Head, who is Christ. And further: even if the sophists, being craftier and more subtle than I, should so entangle and trap me with their arguments for works against faith that I could find no way to answer them — which is in fact impossible — I would still give credit and reverence to Christ alone rather than be persuaded by all the passages they could possibly bring forward to establish the righteousness of works against the teaching of faith.

Therefore the answer to these opponents must be given simply and plainly like this: Here is Christ; there are the Scripture's testimonies about the law and works. Christ is the Lord of Scripture

and of all works. He is also Lord of heaven, earth, the Sabbath, the temple, righteousness, life, wrath, sin, death — and of everything whatever. And Paul His apostle shows that He was made sin and became a curse for me. I therefore conclude that it fell entirely to Christ Himself to overcome my sin, my death, and my curse in His own body — not to the works of the law or to any work of mine. Even reason is compelled to agree and say that Christ is not a work of the law or a work of mine — that His blood and death is not circumcision, keeping of ceremonies, and still less a monk's robe, a shaved head, fasting, vows, or the like. Therefore, if He is the price of my redemption — if He was made sin and curse so that He might justify me and bless me — then I do not care if you bring a thousand Scripture passages for the righteousness of works against the righteousness of faith and cry as loudly as you like that Scripture is against me. I have the Author and Lord of Scripture with me, on whose side I will stand rather than believe all the company of law-workers and merit-seekers. It is in fact impossible that Scripture should be against this teaching — except in the minds of senseless and hardened hypocrites. Among the godly and those with understanding, Scripture bears witness for its Lord, Jesus Christ. So work out for yourself how you will reconcile the Scripture you say is against my teaching. As for me, I will hold to the Author of Scripture.

Therefore if anyone feels unable to adequately reconcile such Scripture passages or answer the objections of opponents, and yet is forced to hear their arguments and objections, let him give this simple and plain answer: 'You are setting against me the servant — that is, Scripture — and not even all of it, not even its main message, but only certain passages about works.' 'I leave that servant

to you.' 'But I come with the Lord Himself, who stands above Scripture and who is for me the merit and price of righteousness and eternal life.' 'I take hold of Him, I cling to Him, and I leave works to you — works you never actually did.' No devil or law-worker can ever take this answer from you or demolish it. Beyond this, you are safe before God — for your heart remains fixed on the object called Christ, who was nailed to the cross and made a curse, not for Himself but for us, as the text says. Hold fast to this and set it against every sentence about the law and works, and say: 'Do you hear this, Satan?' At that, he must give way — for he knows that Christ is his Lord and Master.

Verse 11. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

This is another argument drawn from the testimony of the prophet Habakkuk. It is a statement of great weight and authority, which Paul sets against all the passages that speak of the law and works. It is as if he were saying: Why do we need any lengthy debate? Here I bring forward the clearest possible testimony from the prophet, against which no one can object: 'The righteous shall live by faith' (Habakkuk 2:4). If the righteous lives by faith, then he does not live by the law — for the law is not of faith. And here Paul excludes works and the law as things contrary to faith.

The sophists — always ready to corrupt the Scripture — twist and distort this passage in the following way: 'The righteous man does live by faith' — meaning, they say, by a faith that is active and working, or 'formed' and made perfect by love. But if it is a faith not formed by love, then it does not justify. This explanation they themselves invented, and by it they do violence to the prophet's words. If by 'formed' or 'furnished' faith they meant the true faith

that the Gospel teaches, their explanation would not trouble me at all — for then faith would not be separated from love, only from a shallow opinion of faith. We too distinguish between a counterfeit faith and a true faith. Counterfeit faith is the kind that hears about God, about Christ, and about all the mysteries of His incarnation and our redemption; it takes in and carries away what it hears, can even talk about it fluently — and yet nothing remains in the heart except a bare opinion and an echo of the Gospel. How far this falls short of true faith is plain from this: it neither renews nor transforms the heart. It does not make a new person but leaves him in the emptiness of his old ways and habits. This is a thoroughly dangerous kind of faith. The moral philosopher is actually far better than the hypocrite who holds such a faith.

Therefore if our opponents were making a distinction between their 'formed' faith and a false or counterfeit faith — as I described — their distinction would not trouble me. But they speak of faith in such a way that they make love the form and perfection of faith. This is to place love above faith and to attribute righteousness not to faith but to love. And when they refuse to attribute righteousness to faith except for love's sake, they in effect attribute nothing to faith at all.

But the Holy Spirit, who gives every person both mouth and tongue, knows how to speak. He could have said — as the sophists wickedly imagine — 'The righteous man shall live by faith formed and perfected by love.' But He deliberately leaves that out and says plainly: 'The righteous man lives by faith.' Let these foolish sophists therefore take their wicked and poisonous interpretation and go. We will hold fast to and exalt this faith — the faith that God Himself has named 'faith': a true and certain faith that does

not doubt God, does not doubt His promises, does not doubt the forgiveness of sins through Christ. We dwell safe and secure in Christ our object and keep continually before our eyes the suffering and blood of the Mediator and all His benefits. And it is faith alone — faith that takes hold of Christ — that keeps these benefits from being taken from our sight or wrested away from us. Therefore, setting aside this poisonous interpretation, we must understand this passage as speaking of faith alone. This is exactly what Paul declares when he argues against the notion of faith formed with love.

Verse 12. But the law is not of faith.

The Scholastics say: The righteous man lives if his faith is formed and adorned with love. But Paul says the opposite: 'The law is not of faith.' But what is the law? Is it not also a commandment about love? Indeed, the law commands nothing other than love, as the text itself shows: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul' (Deuteronomy 6:5); and 'showing lovingkindness to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments' (Deuteronomy 5:10); and 'On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22:40). If the law, which commands love, is therefore contrary to faith, it necessarily follows that love is not of faith. So Paul plainly refutes the sophists' invented gloss about 'formed faith' and speaks of faith as it stands separate from the law. Once the law is set aside, love is also set aside — along with everything that belongs to the law. Faith alone remains — faith that justifies and gives eternal life.

Paul therefore argues here from a plain testimony of the prophet: that no one obtains justification and life before God except the believing person, who receives righteousness and eternal

life without the law and without love — by faith alone. The reason is that the law is not of faith — that is, the law is not faith, nor anything belonging to faith, for the law does not believe. Nor are the works of the law faith, or of faith. Faith is therefore something entirely different from the law, just as the promise is entirely different from the law. For the promise is not received by working but by believing. Indeed there is as great a difference between the promise and the law — and therefore between faith and works — as there is between heaven and earth.

It is therefore impossible for faith to be of the law. Faith rests in the promise alone; it alone takes hold of God and knows Him; it stands entirely in receiving good things from God. The law and works, by contrast, consist in demanding, performing, and giving to God. Abel, when he offered his sacrifice, gave to God — but in believing, he received from God. Paul therefore concludes powerfully from Habakkuk that the righteous man lives by faith alone. For the law in no way belongs to faith, since the law is not the promise — and faith rests on the promise alone. Therefore, just as there is a difference between the law and the promise, so there is between works and faith. The Scholastics' gloss, which joins the law with faith — or rather, quenches faith and puts the law in faith's place — is therefore wicked and false. Note here that Paul always speaks of those who perform the law in a moral and external sense, not according to the Gospel. But whatever is said of good works according to the meaning of the Gospel is attributed to faith alone.

Verse 12. But the law is not based on faith; on the contrary, 'The one who does them shall live by them.'

I take this clause to be spoken with a touch of irony. I do not deny that it may also be read in a straightforward sense: that those who fulfill the law outwardly and without faith — in a civil, external manner — shall 'live in them,' meaning they will not be punished externally but will receive earthly rewards. But I read this passage in the broader sense, much as I read Christ's words 'Do this and you will live' — that is, with something of a sarcastic edge. Paul is here showing what the true righteousness of the law and of the Gospel each consist in. The righteousness of the law is to fulfill the law, according to the statement: 'He who does them shall live by them.' The righteousness of faith is to believe, according to the statement: 'The righteous man lives by faith.' The law therefore requires that we yield something to God. But faith does not require that we work or give God anything — only that in believing His promise, we receive from Him. Therefore the highest function of the law is to exact and perform, while the function of faith is to receive the promise. Faith is the faith of the promise; the work is the work of the law. Paul therefore stands on this word 'doing' — and to show clearly what the confidence of the law is and what the confidence of works is, he sets them side by side, promise against law, and faith against works. He says that from the law comes nothing but doing; but faith is a completely different thing — it is what receives and holds the promise.

Away, then, with these sophists and their accursed interpretation, and with their blind distinction between formed and unformed faith. These newly coined terms — 'formed faith,' 'unformed faith,' 'faith acquired by human effort,' and the like — are monsters invented by the devil for no other purpose than to disfigure and destroy true Christian teaching and faith, to blaspheme

and trample Christ underfoot, and to establish the righteousness of works. Works must certainly follow faith — but faith must not be works, nor works faith. The realms and limits of the law and of faith must be rightly distinguished from one another.

When we believe, therefore, we simply live by faith in Christ — who is without sin and who is our shelter, our propitiation, and our forgiveness. By contrast, when we perform the law, we do work — but we have neither righteousness nor life. For the office of the law is not to make righteous and to give life, but to expose sin and to destroy. The law does say: 'He who does these things shall live by them.' But where is the person who actually does the law — who loves God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself? No one does it — and even those who try their hardest, in their doing fail to do it — and therefore remain under the curse. But faith does not work; it believes in Christ the Justifier. A person therefore lives not because of his doing but because of his believing. And the faithful person does begin to fulfill the law — and whatever he fails to do is forgiven through the remission of sins for Christ's sake, and whatever still remains is not counted against him.

Paul in this passage, and in Romans 10, sets the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith side by side when he says: 'He who does these things shall live by them' (Romans 10:5). It is as if he were saying: It would be a wonderful thing if we could fulfill the law — but since no one does, we must flee to Christ, who is 'the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Romans 10:4). He was made under the law to redeem those who were under the law. By believing in Him we receive the Holy Spirit and begin to do the law — and what we fall short of is not counted against us because of our faith in Christ. But in the life to come we

will no longer need faith. For then we will no longer see dimly through a glass (as we do now) but face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). There will be a glorious brightness of the eternal Majesty — we will see God as He truly is. There will be a true and perfect knowledge and love of God, a perfect light of reason, and a perfect will — not a moral and philosophical will as the papist Scholastics dream of, but a heavenly, divine, and eternal one. Here in the meantime, by faith in the Spirit, we await the hope of righteousness (Galatians 5:5). Those, by contrast, who seek forgiveness of sins through the law rather than through Christ, never fulfill the law and remain under the curse.

Paul therefore calls only those righteous who are justified through the promise — through faith in the promise — without the law. Those who are of the works of the law and claim to be doing the law are not actually doing it. For the apostle simply concludes that all who are of the works of the law are under the curse — and they would not be under the curse if they were actually fulfilling the law. It is true in principle that a person who does the works of the law shall live in them — that is, shall be blessed. But no such person can be found. Now, since the law has two uses — one civil and one spiritual — whoever wants to understand this statement in a civil sense may do so: 'He who does these things shall live in them' means that if a person outwardly obeys the magistrate in the realm of civil governance, he will escape punishment and death — the civil authority has no power over him. This is the civil use of the law, which serves to restrain those who are rough and lawless. But Paul here is not speaking of this use — he is handling this passage as a theologian, and therefore a necessary condition is implied. It is as if he said: if people could keep the law, they would be

blessed. But where are those people? They are not doers of the law unless they have first been made righteous before and apart from the law — through faith.

Therefore when Paul condemns those who are of the works of the law, he is not speaking of those who are justified through faith, but of those who try to be justified by works without faith in Christ. I say this lest anyone follow the foolish thinking of Jerome, who being misled by Origen understood nothing of Paul and regarded him as nothing more than an ordinary civil lawyer. On that basis Jerome reasons like this: the holy patriarchs, prophets, and kings were circumcised and offered sacrifice — therefore they kept the law. But it would be wicked to say they are under the curse — therefore not all who are of the works of the law are under the curse. In this way he argues against Paul with no discernment whatsoever, making no distinction between the true doers of the law who are justified by faith and those workers who seek to be justified by the law without faith.

Paul here is speaking nothing against those who are justified by faith and are truly doing the law — for they are not of the works of the law. He is speaking against those who not only fail to keep the law but actually sin against it. For the law commands that we should fear, love, and worship God in true faith. These people do not do this — instead they devise new forms of worship and works that God never commanded, by which God is not appeased but more provoked to anger, according to the words: 'In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Matthew 15:9). Therefore they are full of ungodliness — rebels against God and idolaters, sinning most seriously against the first commandment above all others. Beyond this, they also carry sinful

desires and other deep disorders. In short, there is nothing good in them — they only want to appear righteous on the outside and have people believe they are doing the law.

We who are made righteous by faith — as were the patriarchs, prophets, and all the saints — are likewise not of the works of the law in the matter of justification. But because we are still in the flesh and still have the remnants of sin in us, we are under the law — yet not under the curse, because those remnants of sin are not counted against us for Christ's sake, in whom we believe. For the flesh is an enemy of God, and the sinful desires that remain in us not only fail to fulfill the law but actually sin against it, rebelling within us and dragging us into bondage (Romans 7). Now, if the law is not fulfilled even in the saints — if many things contrary to the law happen in them, if evil desires and the remnants of sin remain in them and so hinder them that they cannot fear and love God, cannot call on God with firm confidence, cannot praise God and honor His word as they ought — how much more is this true of someone who has not yet been justified by faith but is an enemy of God who despises and hates God's word and work with his whole heart? You see then that Paul is speaking here of those who seek to fulfill the law and be justified by it without yet having received faith — not of the fathers and saints as Jerome imagines, who are already justified by faith.

Verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Here again Jerome and the Scholastics who follow him are deeply troubled by this most comforting passage and torture it miserably, trying to remove from Christ the ignominy of being

called a curse. They get around the statement by claiming Paul did not mean it seriously. Most wickedly, they therefore assert that Paul's Scripture contradicts itself. They make their case like this: the statement from Moses that Paul cites here, they say, was not speaking of Christ. Furthermore, the universal word 'everyone' which Paul uses is not present in Moses. Also, Paul leaves out the words 'of God' which appear in Moses. Finally, it is clear enough that Moses was speaking of a thief or criminal who by his evil deeds deserved the gallows, as Deuteronomy 21 plainly shows. Therefore they ask: how can this passage be applied to Christ — that He is cursed of God and hanged on a tree — when He is no criminal or thief but righteous and holy? This may impress simple and uninformed people, who think the sophists or Scholastics are saying something clever and devout by this — protecting the honor and glory of Christ by warning Christians not to think so wickedly of Him as to say He became a curse. Let us therefore consider what Paul actually means.

Paul chose his words here with great care and deliberate precision. But here again we must make a distinction, as Paul's own words make plain. For he does not say Christ was made a curse for Himself, but for us. The entire weight of the matter rests on these two words: 'for us.' For Christ is innocent in His own person and therefore ought never to have been hanged on a tree. But because according to the law of Moses every thief and criminal was to be hanged, Christ was also hanged according to the law — because He took on the person of a sinner and a thief, not of one, but of all sinners and thieves. For we are the sinners and thieves, guilty of death and eternal condemnation. Christ took all our sins upon

Himself and died for them on the cross. Therefore it was necessary that He should become a transgressor — and as the prophet Isaiah says (Isaiah 53), He was 'numbered with the transgressors.'

And this, without doubt, all the prophets foresaw in the Spirit: that Christ would become the greatest sinner, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer who ever existed or could exist in all the world. For He, being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is no longer in that role an innocent person without sins — He is no longer the Son of God born of the virgin Mary standing in His own person. He is a sinner who carries the sin of Paul, who was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an oppressor; of Peter, who denied Christ; of David, who was an adulterer and murderer and caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord; and in short, who carries and bears the sins of all people in His body. Not because He committed them Himself, but because He received them — sins committed by us — and laid them on His own body to make satisfaction for them with His own blood. Therefore the general statement from Moses encompasses Him as well — though in His own person He was innocent — because it found Him among sinners and transgressors. It is like a magistrate who takes someone as a thief and punishes him when he is found among other thieves and criminals, even if he himself has done nothing worthy of death. Christ was not merely found among sinners by chance — He willingly, by the will of His Father, chose to be a companion of sinners, taking upon Himself the flesh and blood of those who were sinners, thieves, and plunged in every kind of wickedness. When the law therefore found Him among thieves, it condemned and killed Him as a thief.

The sophists and Scholastics rob us of this knowledge of Christ and of this most heavenly comfort — namely, that Christ was made a curse in order to deliver us from the curse of the law — when they separate Him from sins and sinners and set Him before us only as an example to be imitated. By doing this they make Christ not only useless to us but actually a judge and a tyrant who is angry with our sins and condemns sinners. But we must understand Christ as wrapped up in our sins, our curse, our death, and all our evils — just as truly as He is wrapped up in our flesh and blood.

But someone will say: 'It is deeply offensive and scandalous to call the Son of God a cursed sinner.' I answer: If you will deny that He is a sinner and under the curse, then you must also deny that He was crucified and died. For it is no less scandalous to say that the Son of God — as our faith confesses — was crucified and suffered the punishments of sin and death, than to say He became a sinner and was cursed. But if it is not scandalous to confess and believe that Christ was crucified between two thieves, then it is not scandalous to say He was made a curse and the greatest of all sinners. Paul's words are not empty: 'Christ became a curse for us.' And as 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: 'God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.'

In the same way, John the Baptist calls Him 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). He is truly innocent — for He is the spotless and undefiled Lamb of God. But because He bears the sins of the world, His innocence is charged with the sin and guilt of the entire world. Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or will ever commit — these are as truly Christ's own sins as if He had committed them Himself. In short:

our sin must become Christ's own sin, or else we will perish forever. This true knowledge of Christ — which Paul and the prophets have set before us so plainly — is what the wicked Scholastics and sophists have darkened and disfigured.

Isaiah says this of Christ in chapter 53: 'God laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6). We must not water down these words but leave them in their full and proper meaning. For God does not play games in the words of the prophet but speaks in complete earnest, and out of immeasurable love — declaring that Christ, this Lamb of God, would bear the sins of us all. But what does it mean to bear? The sophists answer: to be punished. Very well. But why is Christ punished? Is it not because He has sin and bears sin? That Christ has sin, the Holy Spirit Himself testifies in Psalm 40: 'My sins have overtaken me, and I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head' (Psalm 40:12). In this psalm and in others the Holy Spirit speaks in the person of Christ and plainly witnesses that He had sins. For these words are not the voice of an innocent Christ, but of a suffering Christ who took upon Himself the person of all sinners and was therefore made guilty of the sins of the whole world.

Therefore Christ was not only crucified and died — sin also was, through divine love, laid upon Him. When sin was laid upon Him, the law came and said: 'Every sinner must die.' 'Therefore, O Christ, if You will stand in for sinners, take on their guilt, and suffer their punishment, You must also bear their sin and their curse.' Paul therefore rightly cites that general statement from Moses and applies it to Christ: 'Everyone who hangs on a tree is cursed by God; but Christ hung on a tree; therefore Christ is cursed by God.'

And it is a singular and remarkable comfort for all Christians to clothe Christ with our sins in this way — to wrap Him in my sins, your sins, and the sins of the whole world, and to see Him bearing all our iniquities. For beholding Him in this way easily overcomes all the invented ideas of the papists about justification by works. For they imagine — as I have said — a certain faith 'formed and adorned with love.' By this, they say, sins are taken away and people are justified before God. But what is this but to unwrap Christ, strip Him clean of our sins, declare Him innocent, and load us with our own sins — looking at those sins not in Christ but in ourselves? What is this but to take Christ away entirely and make Him utterly useless to us? For if we put away sin through the works of the law and through love, then Christ does not take them away. But if He is the Lamb of God appointed from the beginning to take away the sins of the world — and if He is so wrapped in our sins that He became a curse for us — then it necessarily follows that we cannot be justified by works. For God has laid our sins not on us but on His Son Christ, so that by bearing the punishment for them He might be our peace and by His wounds we might be healed (Isaiah 53:5). Therefore our sins cannot be removed by us. All of Scripture bears witness to this — and we also confess it in the articles of the Christian faith when we say: 'I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, who suffered, was crucified, and died for us.'

From this it is plain that the teaching of the Gospel — which above all others is the sweetest and most filled with unique consolation — says nothing about our works or the works of the law, but only about the immeasurable mercy and love of God toward us, who are utterly wretched and miserable sinners. Our most merci-

ful Father, seeing us crushed and held captive under the curse of the law — bound so tightly that we could never break free by our own strength — sent His only Son into the world and laid upon Him the sins of all people, saying: 'Be Peter the denier; be Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; be David the adulterer; be the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; be the thief hanging on the cross; in short, be the person who has committed the sins of all people — and pay and make satisfaction for them all.' Then the law came and said: 'I find Him a sinner — and such a one as has taken upon Himself the sins of all people, and I see no sin anywhere else but in Him — therefore He must die on the cross.' And so the law set upon Him and killed Him. In this way the whole world is purged and cleansed from all sin and delivered from death and all evils. Now that sin has been defeated and death abolished by this one Man, God would see nothing in the whole world — if it believed — but pure cleansing and righteousness. And if any remnants of sin were to remain, for the sake of the great glory that is in Christ, God would overlook them and not count them against us.

We must magnify the article of Christian righteousness above the righteousness of the law and works — even though no words can fully express its immeasurable greatness. The argument Paul handles here is the mightiest of all arguments against law-righteousness. It contains an irresistible logic that cannot be denied: if the sins of the whole world are in that one man Jesus Christ, then they are not in the world. But if they are not in Him, then they remain in the world. If Christ is made guilty of all the sins we have committed, then we are freed from all sins — not by ourselves, not by our own works or merits, but by Him. But if He is innocent and

does not bear our sins, then we bear them, and in them we will die and be condemned. But thanks be to God, who has given us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now let us see how two such opposite things can be reconciled in this one person, Christ. Not only my sins and yours, but the sins of the whole world — past, present, and future — fall upon Him and set out to condemn Him, and indeed they do condemn Him. But in this same person — who is the greatest, the highest, and the only sinner — there is also an eternal and unconquerable righteousness. So these two meet head-on: the greatest and only sin against the greatest and only righteousness. One of them must be defeated and give way to the other, because they clash with such tremendous force. The sin of the whole world charges against righteousness with all its power. What happens in this battle? Righteousness is eternal, immortal, and unconquerable. Sin is also a powerful and savage tyrant that rules over the whole world, bringing all people into bondage. Indeed, sin is a mighty force that devours all of humanity — the learned, the unlearned, the holy, the powerful, and the wise. This tyrant rushes upon Christ and tries to swallow Him up as it does all others. But it does not see that Christ is a person of unconquerable and eternal righteousness. So in this battle, sin must be defeated and destroyed, and righteousness must triumph, live, and reign. In Christ, then, all sin is conquered, killed, and buried — and righteousness remains the victor and reigns forever.

In the same way, death — which is an all-powerful ruler over the entire world, killing kings, princes, and all people — charges mightily against life, thinking it can entirely overcome and swallow

it up, and it does indeed appear to succeed. But because life was immortal, when it was overcome, it overcame in turn — conquering and killing death.

Death has therefore been conquered and abolished throughout the whole world through Christ, so that now it is merely a hollow shadow of death — stripped of its sting, it can no longer harm those who believe in Christ, who has become the death of death, as the prophet Hosea says: 'O death, I will be your death.'

Likewise, the curse — which is God's wrath upon the whole world — has the same kind of conflict with the blessing: that is, with grace and God's eternal mercy in Christ. The curse fights against the blessing and tries to defeat and destroy it, but it cannot. For the blessing is divine and eternal, and so the curse must give way. If the blessing in Christ could be overcome, then God Himself would also be overcome — and that is impossible. Therefore Christ, the power of God — righteousness, blessing, grace, and life — overcomes and destroys these monsters: sin, death, and the curse, without weapons, in His own body, as Paul delights to say: 'Disarming the rulers and authorities and putting them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Himself' (Colossians 2:15), so that they can no longer harm those who believe.

The phrase 'in Himself' makes this battle all the more wonderful and glorious. It shows that all these immeasurable things had to be accomplished in that one person, Christ — the curse, sin, and death destroyed, and the blessing, righteousness, and life taking their place — so that through this one person the whole creation would be renewed. If you look at the person of Christ, you will see sin, death, the wrath of God, hell, the devil, and all evils conquered

and put to death in Him. Because Christ reigns by His grace in the hearts of believers, there is no sin, no death, no curse. But where Christ is not known, all these things still remain. So all who do not believe lack this immeasurable blessing and glorious victory. For this, as John says, is our victory that overcomes the world — our faith.

This is the central article of all Christian teaching, which the Scholastics have completely obscured. Here you see how necessary it is to believe and confess the article of Christ's divinity — for when Arius denied it, he also necessarily denied the article of our redemption. To overcome the sin of the world, death, the curse, and the wrath of God within Himself is not the work of any creature but of divine power alone. Therefore the one who overcomes these things in Himself must truly and by nature be God. Against the mighty power of sin, death, and the curse — which of itself rules throughout the world and over all creation — a greater and mightier power had to be set. No such power exists apart from the supreme divine power. To abolish sin, to destroy death, to remove the curse from within Himself — and in their place to give righteousness, bring life to light, and bestow the blessing — these are works of divine power alone. Since Scripture attributes all of these to Christ, He is life, righteousness, and blessing — God by nature and in essence. Those who deny the divinity of Christ lose all of Christianity and become no better than Gentiles. We must therefore learn the article of justification carefully, as I often urge you. All the other articles of our faith are contained in it, and if it stands sound, all the rest stand sound as well. When we teach that people

are justified by Christ and that Christ is the conqueror of sin, death, and the eternal curse, we are also testifying that He is truly and substantially God.

This makes plain how terrible the wickedness and blindness of the papists was, when they taught that these cruel and mighty tyrants — sin, death, and the curse, which swallow up all humanity — must be overcome not by the righteousness of God's law (which, though just, good, and holy, can do nothing but bring people under the curse), but by human works: fasting, pilgrimages, masses, vows, and similar trifles. But has anyone ever actually conquered sin, death, and the devil equipped with such weapons? Paul in Ephesians 6 describes an entirely different kind of armor — and that is the armor we must use against these savage enemies. By leaving us naked and unarmed before these unconquerable tyrants, these blind guides have not only handed us over to be devoured but have made us ten times more wicked sinners than thieves, prostitutes, or murderers. For destroying sin, abolishing death, creating righteousness, and giving life belong to divine power alone. Yet the papists attributed this divine power to our own works, saying: 'If you do this deed or that, you will overcome sin, death, and the wrath of God.' In doing so they set us in God's place and, in effect, made us into God. In this way the papists, under the name of Christ, proved themselves to be seven times worse idolaters than the Gentiles ever were. For what happened to them is like what happens to a pig that, after being washed, goes right back to the mud. As Christ says, when a person falls away from faith, an evil spirit re-enters the house from which it was driven

out, taking with it seven spirits more wicked than itself, and there they live. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.

Let us therefore receive this sweet and comforting teaching with thanksgiving and with firm faith. It teaches that Christ, being made a curse for us — that is, a sinner subject to God's wrath — took on our person and laid our sins on His own shoulders, saying: 'I have taken on the sins that all people have committed.' Therefore He was truly made a curse under the law — not for Himself, but as Paul says, for us. For unless He had taken upon Himself my sins and yours and the sins of the whole world, the law would have had no claim over Him, since the law condemns only sinners and holds only them under the curse. Therefore He could neither have been made a curse nor have died, since sin is the only cause of the curse and of death — and from sin He was free. But because He took our sins upon Himself willingly, not by compulsion, He had to bear the punishment and the wrath of God — not for His own person, which was just and unconquerable and could not be found guilty, but for ours.

In this blessed exchange, He took on our sinful person and gave us His innocent and victorious person. Clothed in that person, we are freed from the curse of the law — for Christ willingly became a curse for us, saying: 'As for my own person, I am blessed and have no need of anything. But I will set aside my own person and take on your person and your condition — your human nature — and walk among you in it, suffering death in order to deliver you from death.' Taking on the sin of the whole world in our person, He was seized, suffered, was crucified, and put to death, and became a curse for us. But because He was a divine and eternal per-

son, it was impossible that death could hold Him. So He rose from death on the third day and now lives forever — and in Him there is no longer any sin, no death, no trace of our condition, but only pure righteousness, life, and eternal blessedness.

This image and this mirror we must keep constantly before us and gaze upon it with steady eyes of faith. Whoever does so possesses the innocence and victory of Christ — no matter how great a sinner he may be. By faith alone, then, we are made righteous, for faith takes hold of Christ's innocence and victory. As much as you believe this, that much you receive. If you believe that sin, death, and the curse have been abolished, they are abolished. For Christ has conquered and removed these in Himself, and He wants us to believe that just as there is now no appearance of sin or trace of death in His own person, so there is none in ours — since He has accomplished everything for us.

Therefore, if sin troubles you and death frightens you, know that it is nothing more than a false illusion — a deception of the devil. For in truth there is no longer any sin, curse, death, or devil — Christ has conquered and abolished them all. The victory of Christ is absolutely certain, and there is no defect in the thing itself, which is completely true; the defect is in our unbelief. It is a hard thing for reason to believe these immeasurable blessings and unspeakable riches. On top of this, the devil with his spiritual forces never stops attacking us. The devil with his fiery darts, and his servants with their wicked and false teaching, work to strip this doctrine from us and destroy it entirely. We endure the hatred and fierce persecution of the devil and the world especially on account of this article, which we teach so diligently. For Satan feels the power and fruit of this article.

That there is no longer any sin, death, or curse — since Christ now reigns — we confess daily in the Apostles' Creed: 'I believe in a holy Church.' This is really nothing other than saying: 'I believe there is no sin, no curse, no death in the Church of God.' For those who believe in Christ are not sinners, are not subject to death — they are holy and righteous, lords over sin and death, living forever. But only faith sees this, which is why we say: 'I believe in a holy Church.' If you trust reason and your own eyes, you will conclude the opposite. You see many things in the godly that trouble you — you see them sometimes fall into sin, be weak in faith, be subject to anger, envy, and other evil passions — and so you conclude that the Church is not holy. I reject that conclusion. If I look at my own person or my brother's person, it will never appear holy. But if I look at Christ, who has sanctified and cleansed His Church, then it is completely holy — for He has taken away the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, where sin is seen and felt, there it is — in a sense — no longer sin. According to Paul's theology, there is no sin, no death, no curse remaining in the world, but only in Christ — the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world, who was made a curse to deliver us from the curse. According to philosophy and human reason, by contrast, sin, death, and the curse exist nowhere except in the world, in the flesh, and in sinners. A Scholastic theologian can speak of sin no differently than a pagan philosopher. As a philosopher says, sin clings to a person as color clings to a wall — and therefore it must be cleansed by the opposite action, namely love. But true theology teaches that sin no longer exists in the world — for Christ, upon whom the Father laid the sins of the whole world, conquered and destroyed them in His own

body. Having died once for sin and been raised again, He dies no more. Therefore wherever there is true faith in Christ, sin is abolished, dead, and buried. Where there is no faith in Christ, sin still remains. And though remnants of sin remain in the saints because their faith is not yet perfect, those remnants are still dead in the sense that they are not counted against them because of their faith in Christ.

This is a powerful argument that Paul presses against the righteousness of works. It is not the law or works that deliver us from the eternal curse — it is Christ alone. So I urge you, Christian reader: distinguish Christ from the law, and carefully follow what Paul says and how he says it. All who do not fulfill the law, he says, are necessarily under the curse. But no one fulfills the law — therefore all people are under the curse. He then adds a second proposition: Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. It follows that the law and works do not redeem us from the curse — they actually bring us further under it. Love, therefore — which the Scholastics say gives form and perfection to faith — has not only failed to redeem us from the curse but actually wraps us more deeply in it.

This text makes it plain that all people — even apostles, prophets, and patriarchs — would have remained under the curse if Christ had not stood against sin, death, the curse of the law, and the wrath and judgment of God, and overcome them in His own body. No power of flesh and blood could have overcome those overwhelming and terrifying enemies. But Christ is not the law or a work of the law — He is a divine and human person who took

upon Himself sin, the condemnation of the law, and death — not for Himself, but for us. Therefore all the weight and force of this rests on those two words: for us.

We must not imagine Christ as merely an innocent private person — as the Scholastics and nearly all the early church fathers did — holy and righteous only for Himself. It is true that Christ is perfectly pure and spotless. But you must not stop there, for you do not yet truly have Christ by simply knowing He is God and man. You truly have Him when you believe that this perfectly pure and innocent person has been freely given to you by the Father to be your High Priest and Savior — indeed, your servant. He set aside His own innocence and holiness, took your sinful person upon Himself, bore your sin, your death, and your curse, and was made a sacrifice and a curse for you — so that He might deliver you from the curse of the law.

You can see with what apostolic boldness Paul handles this argument about blessing and curse — for he not only makes Christ subject to the curse but says He was made a curse. Similarly in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul calls Him sin, saying: 'He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.' Although these statements can be explained this way — Christ is made a curse, meaning a sacrifice for the curse; sin, meaning a sacrifice for sin — I think it is better to keep the plain meaning of the words, because the force and impact is greater that way. For when a sinner truly comes to know himself, he feels not only that he is miserable, but that he is misery itself — not only that he is a sinner and is cursed, but that he is sin and the curse itself. It is indeed a great thing to bear sin, the wrath of God,

the curse, and death. The person who truly feels these things — as Christ truly and fully felt them on behalf of all humanity — becomes in that sense sin, death, and the curse itself.

Paul handles this passage with a truly apostolic spirit. No sophist, lawyer, Jew, Anabaptist, or anyone else speaks as he does. Who else would dare take this passage from Moses — 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' — and apply it to Christ? Just as Paul applied that statement to Christ, so we may apply to Christ not only the whole of Deuteronomy 27 but may gather all the curses of Moses' law together and interpret them as falling on Christ. For as Christ is innocent of this general curse in His own person, He is innocent of all the rest as well. And just as He is counted guilty under this general curse — being made a curse for us and hanging on the cross as a criminal, a blasphemer, a murderer, and a traitor — so He is counted guilty under all the others. For all the curses of the law are heaped together and laid upon Him, and He bore and suffered them all in His own body for us. Therefore He was not only cursed — He was made a curse for us.

This is the right, truly apostolic way to interpret Scripture. No one can speak this way without the Holy Spirit — that is, to comprehend the whole law in this one statement, 'Christ was made a curse for us,' and to lay the entire law upon Christ. And conversely, to gather together all the promises of Scripture and declare that they are all fulfilled at once in Christ. This is indeed an apostolic and irresistible argument — drawn not from one passage of the law but from the whole law — and Paul uses it as a sure foundation.

Here we can see how carefully Paul read the holy Scriptures and how precisely he weighed every word of this passage: 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' First, from the

word 'blessing,' he draws this argument: if the blessing is to come to all nations, then all nations are under the curse — including the Jews who have the law. He then cites a Scripture passage to prove that all Jews under the law are under the curse: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in this book.'

He also carefully weighs the phrase 'all nations.' From this he reasons that the blessing belongs not only to the Jews but to all the nations of the entire world. Since it belongs to all nations, it cannot be obtained through the law of Moses — for no nation had the law except the Jews. And even though the Jews had the law, they were so far from obtaining the blessing through it that the harder they tried to keep it, the more they fell under the curse. Therefore there must be another righteousness — one far greater than the righteousness of the law — through which not only Jews but all nations everywhere can receive the blessing.

Finally, Paul interprets the words 'in your seed' to mean that a specific person would come from Abraham's line — namely, Christ — through whom the blessing would then come upon all nations. Since Christ was to bless all nations, He also had to take away the curse from them. But He could not do this through the law, because the law only increases the curse. What did He do then? He joined Himself to the company of the cursed, taking on their flesh and blood, and placed Himself as the mediator between God and people, saying: 'Although I am flesh and blood and now live among the cursed, I am the blessed one through whom all people must be blessed.' In this way He united God and man in one person and, being joined to us who were cursed, was made a curse for us — hiding His blessing within our sin, our death, and our curse, which condemned Him and put Him to death. But because He was the

Son of God, He could not be held by them — He overcame them, led them captive, and triumphed over them, carrying away with Him everything that had attached itself to the flesh He took on for our sake. Therefore all who cling to this flesh are blessed and delivered from the curse — that is, from sin and eternal death.

Those who do not understand this gift of Christ — which the Gospel particularly proclaims — and know no righteousness besides the righteousness of the law, are offended when they hear that works of the law are not necessary for salvation. They are offended to hear that people receive salvation by simply hearing and believing that Christ, the Son of God, took on our flesh and joined Himself to the cursed so that all nations might be blessed. They either understand nothing of this, or they understand it only in a worldly way. Their minds are taken up with other thoughts and imaginary ideas, and so these things strike them as strange. Indeed, even for us who have received the first fruits of the Spirit, it is impossible to understand these things fully — for they clash powerfully with human reason.

To sum up: all evils should have overwhelmed us, as they will overwhelm the wicked forever. But Christ, being made for us a transgressor of all laws, guilty of all our curses, our sins, and all our evils, came as mediator and embraced us wicked and condemned sinners. He took upon Himself and bore all our evils that should have crushed and tormented us forever. These evils beat Him down for a time and rolled over His head like water, as the prophet speaks in Christ's person: 'Your indignation has pressed hard upon me, and You have overwhelmed me with all Your waves.' And again: 'Your wrath has swept over me, and Your ter-

rors have undone me.' By this means, through Christ, we are delivered from these eternal terrors and anguish and will enjoy eternal and immeasurable peace and joy — if we believe.

These are the deep mysteries and secrets that Moses also foreshadowed dimly in certain places — mysteries that the prophets and apostles knew and handed down to those who came after them. The saints of the Old Testament rejoiced more over these things as something yet to come than we do over the same things now that they have been fulfilled. We do acknowledge that this knowledge of Christ and the righteousness of faith is an immeasurable treasure, but we do not feel the full joy of spirit that the prophets and apostles felt. This is why they — and especially Paul — set forth the article of justification so richly and so diligently. For this is the proper work of an apostle: to proclaim the glory and the gift of Christ, and by doing so to lift up and comfort troubled and burdened consciences.

Verse 14. That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Paul always has this passage in view: 'In your seed,' and so on. The blessing promised to Abraham could come upon the Gentiles only through Christ, the seed of Abraham — and it could come only by this means: He had to become a curse, so that the promise made to Abraham, 'In your seed all nations shall be blessed,' might be fulfilled. There was no other way for this promise to be accomplished than for Jesus Christ to become a curse and join Himself to those who were cursed, so that He might remove the curse from them and bring them righteousness and life through His blessing. Note here — as I have warned before — that the word 'blessing' is not empty, as the Jews imagine when they take it to mean merely a

greeting in speech or writing. Paul speaks here of sin and righteousness, of death and life before God. He is speaking of immeasurable and incomprehensible things when he says that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

Consider also what merits we bring and by what means we receive this blessing. This is our merit and our preparation: that Christ Jesus was made a curse for us. For we are ignorant of God, enemies of God, dead in sin, and cursed — so what do we deserve? What can someone deserve who is cursed, ignorant of God, dead in sin, and subject to the wrath and judgment of God? When the Pope excommunicates a person, everything that person does is considered cursed. How much more, then, must we say that a person is cursed before God — as all of us were before we knew Christ — who does nothing but cursed things? Therefore there is no other way to escape the curse than to believe and say with firm confidence: 'You, Christ, are my sin and my curse — or rather, I am Your sin, Your curse, Your death, Your wrath of God, Your hell. And in return, You are my righteousness, my blessing, my life, my grace of God, and my heaven.' The text is plain: Christ was made a curse for us. Therefore we are the reason He was made a curse — indeed, we ourselves are His curse.

This is an excellent passage, full of spiritual comfort. Although it does not satisfy blind and hard-hearted Jews, it satisfies those of us who are baptized and have received this teaching — for it concludes with great power that we are blessed through the curse, the sin, and the death of Christ, meaning we are justified and made alive. As long as sin, death, and the curse remain in us, sin terrifies, death kills, and the curse condemns us. But when these are

transferred and laid on Christ's back, those evils become His own and His good things become ours. Let us therefore learn, in every trial, to transfer sin, death, the curse, and all the evils that oppress us from ourselves onto Christ — and from Him to receive righteousness, mercy, life, and blessing. He bears all our evils upon Himself. God the Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all, as the prophet Isaiah says, and He willingly took it on — for He was not guilty. He did this to fulfill the will of His Father, by which we are made holy forever.

This is the infinite and boundless mercy of God that Paul would gladly express with all the eloquence and words he could find — yet the limited capacity of the human heart cannot comprehend it, much less put into words that unsearchable depth and burning love of God toward us. The immeasurable greatness of God's mercy not only makes it hard to believe, but actually produces unbelief itself. For I am hearing not merely that almighty God, the Creator of all things, is good and merciful — I am hearing that this supreme Majesty cared so deeply for me, a condemned sinner, a child of wrath and eternal death, that He did not spare His own dear Son but handed Him over to a disgraceful and shameful death. Hanging between two thieves, He was made a curse and sin for me — a cursed sinner — so that I might be made blessed, a child and heir of God. Who can praise and magnify this extraordinary goodness of God enough? Not even all the angels in heaven. The teaching of the Gospel — the book of God — speaks of far different things than any book of politics or philosophy, or even the book of Moses itself: namely, the unspeakable and divine gifts of God, which far surpass the understanding of both people and angels.

Verse 14. That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

'The promise of the Spirit' is a Hebrew expression meaning 'the Spirit that was promised.' The Spirit is freedom from the law, sin, death, the curse, hell, and the wrath and judgment of God. There is no merit or worthiness of ours here — only a free promise and a gift given through the seed of Abraham, so that we might be free from all evils and receive every good thing. We receive this freedom and gift of the Spirit through no merits of our own, only through faith alone. For faith alone takes hold of God's promise, as Paul plainly says here: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit, not by works, but by faith.

This is a sweet and truly apostolic teaching, showing that the very things many prophets and kings longed to see and hear have now been fulfilled and given to us. Passages like this one were gathered from the words of various prophets, who foresaw long before in the Spirit that all things would be transformed, restored, and governed by this one man, Christ. Even the Jews, who had the law of God, nevertheless looked for Christ beyond that law. None of the prophets or leaders of God's people established any new law. Elijah, Samuel, David, and all the other prophets remained under the law of Moses — they did not set up new tablets, a new kingdom, or a new priesthood. That great transformation of the kingly priesthood, the law, and the worship was reserved for the one about whom Moses had prophesied long before: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet from your own people, from among your brothers — you shall listen to Him.' It is as if Moses said: 'You shall listen to Him alone, and to no other.'

The early church fathers understood this well. No one could teach more excellent or profound things than Moses himself, who gave outstanding laws covering matters of great importance — such as the Ten Commandments, and especially the first commandment: 'I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.' This command to love God extends even to the angels. It is therefore the source of all divine wisdom. And yet it was still necessary for another teacher to come — Christ — who would bring and teach something far surpassing even these excellent laws: namely, grace and the forgiveness of sins. This is therefore a powerful statement. In this brief phrase — 'that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' — Paul pours out everything he could possibly say. When he can go no further — for nothing greater or more excellent could be said — he stops. He rests there.

Verse 15. Brethren, I speak in human terms: though it is only a man's covenant, once it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds to it.

After this principal and irresistible argument, Paul adds another based on the analogy of a human will or covenant. This may seem like a weak argument — not the kind an apostle should use to confirm something of such great importance. In weighty matters, we normally confirm earthly things by divine things, not divine and heavenly things by earthly comparisons. It is true that such arguments are among the weakest when they attempt to prove heavenly matters with earthly and perishable things, as Scotus is accustomed to doing. Scotus argues: a person is able to love God above all things, because he loves himself above all things — and therefore, since a greater good deserves more love, he is able to love

God above all things by his own natural power. He then concludes that a person can, by pure natural strength alone, easily fulfill the commandment: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.' His reasoning is: since a person can love even the smallest good thing above all things — giving up his own life, the most precious thing of all, for a little money — he can certainly do the same for God's sake.

You have often heard me say that civil ordinances come from God — He has established and approved them just as He has the sun, the moon, and all other creatures. Therefore an argument drawn from God's ordinances or from creation is valid, provided it is used correctly. The prophets very often used illustrations drawn from creation, calling Christ the Sun, the Church the Moon, and the preachers of the Word the stars. There are also many comparisons in the prophets involving trees, thorns, flowers, and the fruits of the earth. The New Testament is similarly full of such illustrations. Therefore, where God's ordinance is reflected in creation, an argument may rightly be drawn from it and applied to divine and heavenly matters.

Our Savior Christ does exactly this in Matthew 7, arguing from earthly things to heavenly: 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?' Similarly Paul argues: we must obey people; therefore, much more must we obey God. Jeremiah in chapter 35 argues the same way: the Rechabites obeyed their father — how much more ought you to have obeyed Me? These things — that fathers give gifts to their children and that children obey their parents — are established by God and are His ordinances. Such arguments are therefore valid

when they are grounded in God's ordering of creation. But when they are drawn from people's corrupt desires, they are worthless. Scotus's argument is an example: 'I love the lesser good, therefore I love the greater even more.' I reject that conclusion. My loving is not God's ordinance — it is a corrupt, sinful distortion. It should be true that if I love myself or another creature, I should love God the Creator even more. But it is not true in practice, because the love with which I love myself is corrupt and against God.

I say this so that no one objects that an argument drawn from perishable things and applied to divine and spiritual matters is worthless. As I have said, such an argument is strong enough — provided it is grounded in God's ordinance, as is the case with the argument Paul makes here. The civil law, which is one of God's ordinances, says it is unlawful to break or alter a person's will. It commands that a person's last will and testament be strictly honored, since this is one of the most sacred and praiseworthy customs among people. Paul therefore argues from this custom of human wills: how is it that people obey other people, but not God? Political and civil ordinances — concerning wills and other such matters — are carefully upheld. Nothing is changed, nothing added, nothing taken away. But the testament of God — His promise concerning the spiritual blessing, that is, heavenly and eternal things, which the whole world ought to receive with great eagerness and honor with the deepest reverence — this is being changed. Paul's argument is forceful when he reasons from human examples and laws this way. When he says 'I speak in human terms,' he means: 'I bring you an illustration from human custom and practice.' When a person makes a last will, leaving his land and goods to his heirs, and then dies, that will is confirmed and

ratified by the testator's death, so that nothing may be added or taken from it — by law and by common justice. Now if a person's will is upheld with such care that nothing can be added or taken away after death, how much more should God's last will be faithfully kept — the will He promised and gave to Abraham and his seed? When Christ died, it was confirmed in Him, and after His death the terms of His testament were opened — that is, the promised blessing of Abraham was proclaimed among all the nations scattered throughout the world. This was God's last will, confirmed by the death of Christ — and no one should change it or add to it, as those who teach the law and human traditions do. They say: unless you are circumcised, keep the law, do many works, and endure many things, you cannot be saved. That is not God's last will and testament. For He did not say to Abraham: 'If you do this or that, you will receive the blessing' — or that those who are circumcised and keep the law will receive it. He said: 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' It is as if He said: 'Out of pure mercy I promise you that Christ will come from your seed and will bring the blessing upon all nations crushed by sin and death — delivering them from the eternal curse of sin and death — and they will receive this promise by faith: In your seed.' Therefore, just as the false apostles were perverters and destroyers of God's testament in their day, so are all the papists and those who seek justification through works in ours. They would never dare to tamper with a person's will — the law forbids it. But God's testament they change without fear, even though He is a consuming fire. Such is the nature of all hypocrites: they observe human law precisely while despising and wickedly transgressing the laws of God. But

the time will come when they will face a terrible judgment and feel what it means to despise and pervert the testament of God. This argument, then, grounded in God's ordinance, is strong enough.

Verse 16. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say 'and to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather 'and to your seed,' as referring to one — who is Christ.

Here Paul gives a new name to God's promises made to Abraham concerning Christ, who was to bring the blessing to all nations — he calls it a testament. And indeed the promise is nothing other than a testament, not yet opened, but sealed. Now a testament is not a law but a gift given freely. Heirs do not expect laws, demands, or burdens from a testament — they expect an inheritance confirmed by it.

First Paul explains the words, then he applies the analogy, resting his argument on the word 'seed.' No laws were given to Abraham, he says — instead a testament was made and delivered to him: promises were declared to him concerning the spiritual blessing. So something was promised and given to him. If a person's testament is upheld, why should God's testament not be upheld even more — a testament of which the human will is only a shadow? And again: if we keep the symbols, why do we not rather keep the realities they signify?

The promises were made to Abraham not in all the Jews or in many seeds, but in one seed — which is Christ. The Jews will not accept Paul's interpretation, arguing that the singular 'seed' is simply used in place of the plural, meaning many. But we gladly receive Paul's meaning and interpretation. He repeatedly uses the word 'seed' and consistently interprets it as referring to Christ —

and he does this with a truly apostolic spirit. The Jews may deny it as much as they like; we nonetheless have the strong arguments Paul has already set forth, which confirm this interpretation and which they cannot refute. So much for the analogy drawn from God's ordinance — that is, from human wills. Now Paul goes on to explain and develop the analogy further.

Verse 17. What I mean is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Here the Jews might object: God was not satisfied with giving promises to Abraham — after 430 years He also gave the law. God therefore, distrusting His own promises as insufficient to justify, added something better: the law. Now that this better thing had come, they argue, it was the doers of the law — not the idle believers of a promise — who would be made righteous. The law, they say, followed the promise and therefore superseded it. These are the kinds of evasions and loopholes the Jews look for.

Paul answers this objection sharply and powerfully, and refutes it completely. The law, he says, was given 430 years after the promise — 'In your seed,' and so on — and it could not make the promise void and useless. For the promise is God's testament, confirmed by God Himself in Christ many years before the law. What God has once promised and confirmed, He does not revoke — it remains ratified and certain forever.

Why then was the law added? It was delivered so many generations after Abraham's time — not so that people might obtain the blessing through it (for the function of the law is to bring people under the curse, not to bless), but so that there might be a people

in the world who would have the word and testimony of Christ, from whom Christ could also come according to the flesh. People kept under the law would sigh and long for their deliverance through the seed of Abraham — Christ — who alone could and would bless, that is, deliver all nations from sin and eternal death. Furthermore, the ceremonies commanded in the law foreshadowed Christ. Therefore the promise was not abolished by the law or by the ceremonies of the law, but was rather confirmed for a time by them, as by certain seals — until the actual text of the testament (that is, the promise itself) could be opened and spread among all nations through the preaching of the Gospel.

But let the law and the promise face each other, and we will see which is stronger — whether the promise can abolish the law, or the law can abolish the promise. If the law abolishes the promise, it follows that we, through our works, make God a liar and render His promise worthless. For if the law justifies us and delivers us from sin and death — and if our works and our own strength can fulfill the law — then the promise made to Abraham is completely void and useless, and God is a liar and a deceiver. For when someone who makes a promise refuses to keep it and makes it worthless, what is that but proving himself a liar? But it is impossible that the law should make God a liar, or that our works should make the promise void. Rather, the promise must remain firm and stable forever — for God does not promise in vain — even if we were somehow able to keep and fulfill the law. Even if all people were as holy as angels and had no need of the promise — which is of course impossible — we must still hold that the promise stands absolutely certain. Otherwise God would be found a liar who either

promised in vain or is unwilling or unable to keep His promises. Therefore, just as the promise came before the law, it is also far more excellent than the law.

And God acted wisely in giving the promise so long before the law. He did this on purpose — so that it could never be said that righteousness came through the law and not through the promise. For if He wanted us to be justified by the law, He would have given the law 430 years before the promise, or at least at the same time. But in fact He first spoke nothing at all about the law, and only gave it 430 years later. All that time, He spoke only of His promises. Therefore the blessing and the free gift of righteousness came before the law, through the promise. The promise is therefore far more excellent than the law. The law does not abolish the promise — rather, faith in the promise destroys the power of the law, so that the law can no longer increase sin, terrify sinners, or drive them to despair. Through faith, believers lay hold of the promise — as they did even before Christ's time — and now that same promise has been proclaimed by the Gospel throughout the whole world.

There is also special emphasis worth noting in the fact that Paul explicitly states the number 430 years. It is as if he is saying: 'Think carefully about how long it was between the giving of the promise and the giving of the law.' It is plain that Abraham received the promise long before the law — the law was given to the people of Israel 430 years afterward. This is an irresistible argument built on a specific, fixed point in history. Paul is also not speaking of the law in general here, but specifically of the written law. It is as if he says: God could not at that earlier time have had in mind the ceremonies and works of the law as the basis for giving righteousness to those who observe them. The written law did not

yet exist — the law that commands ceremonies, requires works, and promises life to those who observe them, saying: 'The man who does these things will live by them.' And even though the law promises these things, it does not follow that anyone actually obtains them — for the text plainly says: 'The man who does these things.' And it is certain that no one can do them. Paul therefore concludes that the law cannot abolish the promise — the promise made to Abraham 430 years before the law stands firm and certain. To make this clearer, consider this illustration: if a wealthy man, not under any obligation but freely out of his own good will, adopted someone he had never known and who owed him nothing, and appointed him as heir to all his property, and then several years later laid on him a set of rules to follow — that man cannot now claim he deserved the inheritance by his works, since he had received it freely as a gift many years before, without being asked to do anything. In the same way, God could not have based righteousness on our works and merits — for the promise and the gift of the Holy Spirit came 430 years before the law.

From this it is clear that Abraham obtained righteousness before God not through the law — for there was no law yet. If there was no law, there were no works and no merits. What was there then? Nothing but the bare promise. Abraham believed that promise, and it was counted to him as righteousness. By the same means through which the father received the promise, his children receive and hold it as well. So we say today: our sins were cleansed by the death of Christ more than fifteen hundred years ago, when there were no religious orders, no canon of penance, no merits of fittingness or worthiness. We cannot now begin to undo what He accomplished by our own works and merits.

Paul builds his arguments from analogies, from specific dates, and from persons — so solid and thorough on every side that no one can deny them. Let us therefore arm and equip our consciences with such arguments, for they help us greatly when temptation comes. They lead us from the law and works to the promise and to faith — from wrath to grace, from sin to righteousness, from death to life. These two things — the law and the promise — must therefore be carefully distinguished, as I often repeat. In time, place, person, and all other circumstances they are as far apart as heaven and earth, the beginning of the world and the end of it. They are close neighbors in the sense that they dwell together in one person and one soul. But in inner experience and in their function, they must be kept far apart — the law ruling over the flesh, and the promise sweetly and comfortably reigning in the conscience. When you have assigned each to its proper place, you walk safely between them — in heaven by the promise, and on earth by the law. In spirit you walk in the paradise of grace and peace; in the flesh you walk on the earth of works and the cross. Now the troubles the flesh must endure will not weigh so heavily on you, because of the sweetness of the promise, which enormously comforts and gladdens the heart. But if you confuse and mix the two together — putting the law in the conscience and the promise of freedom in the flesh — you create the same chaos that reigned in popery, where no one could tell what the law was, what the promise was, what sin was, or what righteousness was.

Therefore, if you are going to rightly divide the word of truth, you must make a great distinction between the promise and the law in your inner life and in all of your practice. It is not without reason that Paul pursues this argument so diligently. He foresaw

in the Spirit that this corruption would creep into the Church — that the word of God would be confused, the promise mixed with the law, and the promise thereby completely lost. For when the promise is mixed with the law, it becomes nothing other than law itself. Therefore train yourself to separate the promise and the law, even in terms of time. When the law comes and accuses your conscience, say: 'Lady law, you are not in season — you have come too soon. Wait until 430 years have passed, and then come as strongly as you like. But even then you will come too late — for the promise has already gone before you by 430 years, and I have rested in it.' 'Therefore I have nothing to do with you. I will not hear you. For now I live with believing Abraham — or rather, since Christ has now been revealed and given to me, I live in Him, who is my righteousness and who has abolished you, O law.' Let Christ therefore always be before your eyes — the single summary of all arguments for the defense of faith, against the righteousness of the flesh, against the law, and against all works and merits whatever.

I have now reviewed nearly all the principal arguments Paul handles in this letter for the confirmation of the doctrine of justification. Among them, the argument from the promise made to Abraham and to the other fathers is the weightiest and most powerful — and Paul pursues it here and in the letter to the Romans, carefully weighing the words and examining both the time periods and the persons involved. He also rests his argument on the word 'seed,' applying it to Christ. He then makes clear by contrast what the law produces — namely, holding people under the curse. In this way he fortifies the article of Christian righteousness with strong and powerful arguments. On the other side, he demolishes the arguments of the false apostles who defended the righteous-

ness of the law, turning their arguments back on them. They contended that righteousness and life are obtained through the law. Paul shows instead that the law produces only curse and death. 'You claim,' he says, 'that the law is necessary for salvation. Have you not read that it says: He who does these things shall live by them? Now, who actually does them? No one. Therefore all who are of the works of the law are under the curse.' And again in another place: 'The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.' Now follows the conclusion of all these arguments.

Verse 18. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise.

As Paul says in Romans 4: 'For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is emptied and the promise is nullified.' It cannot be otherwise, for the distinction is plain: the law is something entirely different from the promise. Even natural reason, however blind, is compelled to admit that promising and demanding are two different things — giving and taking are two different things. The law demands and exacts our works; the promise of the Seed freely offers us the spiritual and eternal blessings of God, for Christ's sake. We therefore receive the inheritance and the blessing through the promise, not through the law. The promise says: 'In your seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed.' Therefore having the law is not enough, because the law does not bring the blessing — without the blessing a person is still under the curse. The law cannot justify because the blessing is not attached to it. Moreover, if the inheritance were based on law, God would be found a liar and the promise would be worthless. If the law could obtain the blessing, why did God make the promise 'In your seed'? Why did He not simply say: 'Do this and you will receive the blessing,' or 'By keeping the

law you may earn eternal life'? The argument rests on opposites: the inheritance is given through the promise, and therefore not through the law.

Verse 18. But God granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

It cannot be denied that God gave the inheritance and the blessing to Abraham through the promise before the law ever existed — meaning forgiveness of sins, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, and the right to be children and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. For it is plainly stated in Genesis: 'In your seed all nations shall be blessed.' The blessing is given there freely, without any consideration of the law or of works. God gave the inheritance before Moses was born, before anyone had thought of the law. Why, then, do you boast that righteousness comes through the law, when righteousness, life, and salvation were given to your father Abraham without the law — indeed before any law existed? Anyone unmoved by these arguments is blind and stubborn. But I have already treated this argument about the promise at greater length, so I will only touch on it briefly here.

We have now covered the main body of this letter. The apostle now turns to explaining the purpose and function of the law, adding illustrations of the tutor and the young heir, as well as the allegory of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Finally he sets out some practical instructions about how to live.

Verse 19. Why the law then?

When we teach that a person is justified without the law and without works, this question necessarily follows: if the law does not justify, why was it given? Why does God burden us with the

law, if it does not justify? Why are we so harshly subjected to it, if those who worked only one hour are made equal with those who have borne the heat and burden of the whole day? Once the grace proclaimed by the Gospel is announced, this kind of loud complaint immediately arises — and the Gospel cannot be preached without it. The Jews believed that if they kept the law, they would be justified by it. So when they heard the Gospel proclaimed about Christ, who came to save not the righteous but sinners, and that sinners would enter the kingdom of God ahead of them, they were deeply offended. They complained that they had borne the heavy yoke of the law for so many years with great labor and toil, that they had been wretchedly burdened by the tyranny of the law, and all for nothing — or rather, to their great harm. Meanwhile, Gentiles who had been idolaters received grace without any labor or effort. Today our papists murmur in the same way, saying: 'What good has it done us that we spent twenty, thirty, or forty years in a monastery — that we vowed chastity, poverty, and obedience, said so many psalters and canonical hours and masses, and punished our bodies with fasting, prayer, and self-discipline? And now a husband, a wife, a prince, a governor, a master, a student, a laborer carrying sacks, or a servant girl sweeping the floor will not only be made equal to us before God but will actually be regarded as better and more worthy?'

This is a hard question that leaves reason speechless and greatly offended. Reason can understand the righteousness of the law to some extent — it teaches it, insists on it, and imagines that those who keep it are righteous. But it does not understand the purpose and goal of the law. So when reason hears Paul's statement, which is foreign and unknown to the world — that the law

was given on account of transgressions — it concludes: Paul is abolishing the law, since he says it does not justify. Indeed, he is blaspheming God who gave the law by saying it was given for transgressions. Let us therefore live like Gentiles who have no law. Let us sin and remain in sin, so that grace may abound. Let us do evil so that good may come from it. This happened to the apostle Paul, and the same happens to us today. When ordinary people hear from the Gospel that righteousness comes by God's pure grace through faith alone, without the law and without works, they quickly conclude — as the Jews once did — that if the law does not justify, there is no need to do anything. And they live out that conclusion very consistently.

What then should we do? This wickedness greatly troubles us, but we cannot cure it. When Christ preached, He was accused of being a blasphemer and a troublemaker — someone whose teaching led people astray and stirred up rebellion against Caesar. The same happened to Paul and all the other apostles. Why should we be surprised if the world accuses us today in the same way? Let it accuse us, slander us, and persecute us without mercy — we must still not be silent but speak freely, so that burdened consciences may be rescued from the devil's traps. We must not let the foolish and godless misuse of our teaching stop us — those people cannot be reformed whether they have a law or not. What we must focus on is how troubled consciences can be comforted, so that they do not perish with the crowd. If we stayed silent and said nothing, poor afflicted consciences would have no comfort — those so tangled up in human laws and traditions that they cannot find their way out.

When Paul saw some people opposing his teaching and others using the freedom of the Gospel as an excuse for living however they wished and becoming worse than before, he took comfort in this: he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, sent to preach the faith to God's elect, and he had to endure all things for the sake of the elect, so that they too might be saved. We do the same today — we do all things for the sake of the elect, whom we know are being built up and comforted through our teaching. As for the dogs and pigs — those who either attack our teaching or trample underfoot the freedom we have in Christ Jesus — I am so offended by them that I would not speak a single word for their sake. I would rather they were still subject to the Pope's tyranny, along with our adversaries, than that the holy name of God should be so blasphemed and dishonored because of them.

Therefore, although both foolish and ignorant people — and those who think themselves very wise — argue this way: 'If the law does not justify, then it is pointless and useless' — this does not make it true. This logic is no better than saying: money does not justify, therefore it is useless; or, eyes do not justify, therefore they should be torn out; or hands do not justify, therefore they should be cut off. The argument 'the law does not justify, therefore it is useless' is equally invalid — for every thing must be assessed according to its proper purpose and use. We do not destroy or condemn the law by saying it does not justify. We simply answer the question differently: what then is the purpose of the law? Our answer is different from our opponents', who wickedly and wrongly invent a purpose for the law that does not belong to it.

Against this misuse and invented purpose of the law, we dispute and answer with Paul: the law does not justify. But in saying this, we are not saying the law is useless — as our opponents immediately conclude: 'If the law does not justify, then it was given for nothing.' Not so. The law has its proper purpose and function — but that function is not what the opponents imagine, namely, to make people righteous. Instead it accuses, terrifies, and condemns them. We say with Paul that the law is good if it is used rightly — that is, used as law. If I give the law its proper definition and keep it within the boundaries of its purpose, it is an excellent thing. But if I move it into another role and attribute to it what does not belong to it, I pervert not only the law but the whole of Scripture.

Paul here argues against those dangerous hypocrites who cannot accept the statement that the law was added on account of transgressions. They believe the purpose of the law is to justify. This is the general opinion of human reason — among the Scholastics and throughout the world — that righteousness is obtained through works of the law. And reason will not give up this harmful opinion under any circumstances, because it does not understand the righteousness of faith. This is why the papists say, both foolishly and wickedly: the Church has God's law, the traditions of the fathers, the decrees of councils — if it lives according to these, it is holy. No one can convince these people that by keeping such things they do not please God but provoke His wrath. In short, those who trust in their own righteousness believe they can quiet God's wrath through self-chosen worship and voluntary religious exercises. This opinion of righteousness through law-keeping is therefore the source of all evils — the sin of sins of the whole world. Gross sins and vices can be recognized, and either corrected

or at least restrained by the civil authorities. But this sin — a person's belief in their own righteousness — will not only not be recognized as sin but will be esteemed as high religion and righteousness itself. This deadly sin is therefore the devil's greatest power over the whole world — the serpent's head and the snare by which the devil entangles and holds all people captive. For by nature all people believe they are made righteous by keeping the law. Paul therefore, in order to show the true purpose and function of the law, and to pull out of people's hearts that false belief in law-righteousness, answers the objection — 'Why then the law if it does not justify?' — in this way: it was not given to make people righteous, but rather —

Verse 19. It was added because of transgressions.

As different things have different purposes, so their uses must be kept distinct — they must not be mixed together. If they are mixed, confusion of the things themselves inevitably follows. A woman must not wear a man's clothing, nor a man a woman's. Let men do the work that belongs to men, and women the work that belongs to women. Let every person fulfill what their calling and station requires. Let pastors and preachers teach God's word faithfully. Let civil authorities govern their people, and let people obey their authorities. Let everything serve in its proper place and order. Let the sun shine by day, the moon and stars by night; let the sea provide fish, the earth grain, and the forests game and timber. In the same way, let the law not usurp the office that belongs to something else — namely, justification. Let it leave justification to grace, to the promise, and to faith. What then is the proper office of the law? Transgression — or as Paul says elsewhere: 'the law came in so that transgression would increase.' A striking purpose,

to be sure. The law was added on account of transgressions, he says — that is, it was added alongside and after the promise, to remain until Christ the Seed came, to whom the promise had been made.

Of the Double Use of the Law

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Here you must understand that the law has two distinct uses. The first is civil: God has established civil laws — indeed all laws — to punish transgressions. Every law is therefore given to restrain sin. Does this mean that restraining sin makes people righteous? Not at all. When I do not murder, do not commit adultery, and do not steal — when I refrain from other sins — I do so not willingly or out of love for virtue, but because I fear prison, the sword, and the executioner. These are what hold me back from sinning, just as chains and ropes restrain a lion or a bear from tearing apart everything in its path. Restraint from sin is not righteousness — it is actually a sign of unrighteousness. Just as a wild or mad beast is chained so it cannot destroy everything around it, the law bridles a frenzied and violent person so he cannot act on his evil desires. This restraint plainly shows that those who need the law — everyone who is without Christ — are not righteous at all, but wicked and out of control, people who need the bonds and prison of the law to keep them from sinning. The law, therefore, does not justify.

The first use of the law, then, is to restrain the wicked. The devil reigns throughout the entire world and drives people into all kinds of horrible wickedness. So God has established magistrates,

parents, ministers, laws, restraints, and all civil ordinances — if they can accomplish nothing more, they can at least bind the devil's hands so he cannot act through his captives however he pleases. Just as those who are possessed, under the devil's powerful control, are kept in chains so they cannot harm others — so in the world, which is possessed by the devil and rushing headlong into all wickedness, the magistrate is present with his restraints — that is, his laws — binding the world's hands and feet to keep it from running into every kind of evil. And if someone refuses to be bridled this way, he loses his head. This civil restraint is very necessary and ordained by God, both for public peace and for the preservation of all things — and especially so that the progress of the Gospel is not hindered by the violence and rebellion of wicked, reckless, and proud people. But Paul is not speaking here about this civil use of the law. It is indeed necessary, but it does not justify. A demon-possessed or mad person is not free from the devil's grip, nor well in his mind, simply because his hands and feet are bound and he cannot do harm. In the same way, the world — though restrained by the law from outward wickedness — is not righteous on account of that restraint. It remains wicked. This very restraint shows plainly that the world is wicked and violent, driven to all wickedness by its prince, the devil — otherwise there would be no need for laws to keep it from sinning.

The second use of the law is divine and spiritual. As Paul says, it is to increase transgressions — that is, to reveal to a person his sin, his blindness, his misery, his ungodliness, his ignorance, his hatred and contempt of God, death, hell, the judgment, and the deserved wrath of God. Paul treats this use at length in Romans 7. This use is entirely unknown to hypocrites, to the Scholastics and

papist theologians, and to all who live under the assumption that they are righteous by law-keeping or by their own goodness. But in order to restrain and break down this monster — this mad beast of self-righteousness, which naturally makes people proud and inflates them so that they think they please God greatly — God had to send a kind of Hercules to charge at this monster with full force and power and destroy it completely. That is to say, He was compelled to give the law at Mount Sinai with such majesty and such terrifying display that the whole multitude was struck with awe (Exodus 19-20).

This spiritual use is the proper and principal use of the law, and it is immensely useful and necessary. Take someone who is not a murderer, not an adulterer, not a thief, and who outwardly refrains from sin like the Pharisee in the Gospel. Because he is in the grip of the devil, he will swear he is righteous, and so he develops a settled opinion of his own righteousness, presuming on his own good works and merits. God cannot soften and humble such a person — so that he recognizes his misery and condemnation — by any means other than the law. For the law is the hammer of death, the thunder of hell, and the lightning of God's wrath that smashes the obstinate and unfeeling hypocrite to pieces. This is therefore the proper and true use of the law: with lightning, storm, and the blare of the trumpet — as at Mount Sinai — to terrify, and by its thunder to batter down and shatter this beast called the opinion of righteousness. This is why God says through Jeremiah the prophet: 'My word is a hammer that shatters rock' (Jeremiah 23:29). For as long as the opinion of personal righteousness remains in a person, so too do incomprehensible pride, presumption, false security, hatred of God, contempt of grace and mercy,

and ignorance of the promises and of Christ. The preaching of free forgiveness of sins through Christ cannot enter such a heart, and the person cannot taste or feel any part of it. The mighty stone wall of self-righteousness that surrounds the heart blocks it out completely.

Because the opinion of righteousness is such a great and terrible monster — a rebellious, stubborn, and stiff-necked beast — God needs a mighty hammer to destroy and overthrow it: the law. The law is in its proper use and office when it accuses and exposes sin like this: 'Look — you have transgressed all the commandments of God' — and then strikes such terror into the conscience that it feels God truly is offended and angry, and that it is guilty of eternal death. At this point the poor afflicted sinner feels the crushing weight of the law and is beaten down to the very edge of despair — overwhelmed with such anguish and terror that he longs for death or even seeks to destroy himself. The law is therefore that hammer, that fire, that mighty wind, and that terrible earthquake that splits the mountains and shatters the rocks — that is, the proud and obstinate hypocrites. Elijah, unable to endure the terrors of the law that these things represent, covered his face with his mantle. Yet when that storm had passed — which he had witnessed — there came a soft and gentle wind, and the Lord was in it. But the tempest of fire, wind, and earthquake had to pass before the Lord revealed Himself in that gentle wind.

This terrifying display in which God gave His law at Mount Sinai illustrated the use of the law. Among the people of Israel who came out of Egypt there was a remarkable sense of holiness. They boasted and said: 'We are the people of God — we will do everything the Lord our God has commanded.' Moses sanctified the

people, told them to wash their clothes, refrain from their wives, and prepare themselves for the third day. Every single person among them was full of a sense of holiness. On the third day Moses led the people out of their tents and toward the mountain into the presence of the Lord, so they might hear His voice. What happened then? When the Israelites saw the mountain smoking and burning, the dark clouds, the lightning flashing through the terrifying darkness, and heard the trumpet blast growing louder and louder — and when they heard the thunder and saw the lightning — they were afraid. Standing at a distance, they said to Moses: 'We will do everything willingly — only do not let the Lord speak to us, lest we die, and this great fire consume us. You speak to us, and we will listen.' So what did their purification, their holiness, their clean clothes, and their abstinence profit them? Nothing at all. Not one of them could stand before the presence of the Lord in His majesty and glory — all were stunned and shaken with terror, and fled back as if driven away by force. For God is a consuming fire; no human flesh can stand in His presence.

The law of God has precisely this function — the same function it had at Mount Sinai when it was first given, first heard by people who had washed, purified themselves, and prepared themselves as righteous. And yet even so it brought that holy people to such a knowledge of their own misery that they were driven all the way to the edge of death and despair. No purity or holiness helped them. Instead they felt such a sense of their own uncleanness, unworthiness, and sin — such an awareness of the judgment and wrath of God — that they fled from the Lord's presence and could not bear to hear His voice. 'What human being has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire, and lived?' they

said. 'This day we have seen that God speaks with man, and yet man lives.' How different this sounded from what they had said a little while before: 'We are the holy people of God, chosen by the Lord as His own special people above all nations of the earth. We will do everything the Lord has commanded.' This is exactly what happens in the end to all who seek justification by their own works — those who, drunk with the opinion of their own righteousness, think when they are free from temptation that God loves them, that God looks with favor on their vows, their fasting, their prayers, and their self-imposed religious works, and that He will therefore give them a special crown in heaven. But when the thunder, lightning, fire, and the hammer that shatters rocks — that is, God's law — comes suddenly upon them and shows them their sin and God's wrath and judgment, then exactly what happened to the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai happens to them.

Here I urge all who fear God — especially those who will one day teach others — to learn diligently from Paul the true and proper use of the law. I fear this understanding will be trampled underfoot and completely lost by the enemies of the truth after our time. For even now, while we are still alive and working hard to explain the function of both the law and the Gospel, there are very few — even among those who call themselves Christians and profess the Gospel alongside us — who truly understand these things as they should. What do you think will happen when we are dead and gone? I say nothing of the Anabaptists, the new Arians, and other empty-headed spirits, who understand these matters no better than the papists do, however much they may claim otherwise. They have turned away from the pure teaching of the Gospel to laws and traditions, and therefore they do not teach Christ. They

boast and swear that they seek nothing but the glory of Christ and the salvation of their neighbors, and that they teach God's word purely. But in reality they corrupt it and twist it to mean what they want, making it say what their own imagination dictates. Under the name of Christ they teach nothing but their own fantasies, and under the name of the Gospel, ceremonies and laws. They remain what they always were: monks, workers of the law, and teachers of ceremonies — they have only invented new names and new activities.

It is no small matter to understand rightly what the law is and what its true purpose is. Because we teach these things both carefully and faithfully, we clearly demonstrate that we are not rejecting the law and works, as our opponents falsely accuse us of doing. We fully affirm the law and require its works. We say the law is good and profitable — but within its proper use: first, to restrain outward transgressions in civil life, and then to expose and increase spiritual transgressions. The law is therefore a kind of light — but it does not reveal the grace of God, or righteousness, or life. It reveals sin, death, and the wrath and judgment of God. Just as at Mount Sinai the thunder, lightning, thick dark cloud, the smoking and flaming mountain, and all that terrifying display did not gladden or enliven the Israelites but terrified and overwhelmed them, showing them how unable they were — despite all their purifying and holiness — to stand before God's majesty speaking from the cloud: so the law in its proper use does nothing except reveal sin, produce wrath, accuse and terrify people, and drive them to the very edge of despair. This is the proper use of the law, and here it ends. It ought to go no further.

The Gospel, by contrast, is a light that illuminates, enlivens, comforts, and lifts up frightened consciences. It shows that God, for Christ's sake, is merciful to sinners — even to the most unworthy — if they believe that through His death they have been delivered from the curse, that is, from sin and eternal death, and that through His victory the blessing is freely given to them: grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life. By drawing this distinction between the law and the Gospel, we give each its proper purpose and function. This distinction between the law and the Gospel is nowhere to be found in the books of the monks, the canon lawyers, the Scholastics, or the early church fathers. Augustine understood and showed something of this distinction. Jerome and others did not know it. For many years this distinction was almost completely silent in all schools and churches. And this brought great danger to people's consciences. For unless the Gospel is clearly distinguished from the law, true Christian teaching cannot be kept sound and uncorrupted. When this distinction is well understood, the true way of justification becomes clear — and it becomes easy to distinguish faith from works, Christ from Moses, and Gospel from all law-based religion. For everything apart from Christ serves only as a minister of death and punishment for the wicked. Paul therefore answers the question in this way:

Verse 19. The law was added because of transgressions.

That is, so that transgressions might be further increased, recognized, and seen for what they are. And indeed that is what happens. When sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and hell are revealed to a person through the law, that person cannot help but become impatient and murmur against God, resisting His will.

He cannot bear the judgment of God, his own death and damnation — and yet he cannot escape them. Here he must necessarily fall into hatred of God and blasphemy against Him. Before temptation came, he was a very devout man — worshipping and praising God, bowing his knee before Him and giving thanks, just as the Pharisee did in Luke 18. But now that sin and death are revealed to him, he wishes there were no God. The law therefore produces a deep hatred of God. And so sin is not only revealed and recognized through the law — it is also increased and stirred up by the law. This is why Paul says in Romans 7: 'Sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me — so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.' He treats this effect of the law at length there.

Paul therefore answers the question: if the law does not justify, what is it for? Although it does not justify, he says, it is still very useful and necessary. First, it outwardly restrains those who are fleshly, rebellious, and obstinate. Beyond that, it acts like a mirror that shows a person himself — that he is a sinner, guilty of death, and deserving of God's eternal wrath and anger. What good does this humbling, this bruising, this battering by the hammer of the law do? Great good — it prepares an entrance for grace. The law is therefore a servant that prepares the way for grace. For God is the God of the humble, the miserable, the afflicted, the crushed, and the desperate — of all those who have been brought to nothing. His nature is to lift up the humble, to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to comfort the miserable and the brokenhearted, to justify sinners, to give life to the dead, and to save even the most desperate and condemned. He is, after all, the almighty Creator who makes all things out of nothing. But that destructive and deadly

opinion of personal righteousness — which refuses to be a sinner, unclean, miserable, and condemned, but insists on being righteous and holy — does not allow God to do His natural and proper work. God must therefore take up this hammer — the law — to beat down, smash to pieces, and bring to nothing this beast with her empty confidence, wisdom, righteousness, and strength, so that she might learn at last through her own misery and ruin that she is utterly lost and condemned. Then, when the conscience has been so terrified by the law, the teaching of the Gospel and grace comes in and lifts it up again, saying: Christ came into the world not to break the bruised reed or quench the smoldering wick — but to preach the Gospel of good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim forgiveness of sins to the captives.

Here lies all the difficulty: when a person has been terrified and cast down by the law, he must be able to lift himself up again and say: 'I have been bruised and beaten down enough. The law has tormented and vexed me sharply enough. Now is the time of grace, now is the time to hear Christ — from whose mouth come words of grace and life. Now is the time to look not at the smoking and burning Mount Sinai, but at Mount Moriah, where the throne, the temple, and the mercy seat of God stand — that is, Christ, who is the king of righteousness and peace. There I will listen to what the Lord says to me, who speaks nothing but peace to His people.'

In practice, however, human folly is so great that when the law has done its work and exercised its true ministry in the terrified conscience, the person does not lay hold on the teaching of grace — which promises forgiveness of sins through Christ with complete certainty. Instead, he looks for and piles on himself more laws to try to quiet and satisfy his conscience. 'If I live,' he says, 'I will re-

form my life; I will do this, I will do that.' Unless you do the exact opposite — unless you send Moses away with his law to deal with those who are secure, proud, and stubborn, and in your terror and anguish take hold of Christ, who was crucified and died for your sins — you will find no salvation.

So the law, through its work, indirectly assists in justification by driving a person to the promise of grace and making that promise sweet and comforting to him. We do not abolish the law — we show its true purpose and function: it is a faithful and useful servant that drives a person to Christ. Therefore, after the law has humbled you, terrified you, and beaten you down to the brink of despair, learn how to use the law rightly. Its purpose is not only to reveal sin and the wrath of God, but also to drive people to Christ. This use of the law is set forth by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, which testifies that God is present with the afflicted and brokenhearted. Therefore if you are crushed by this hammer, do not respond wrongly by piling more laws onto yourself — but hear Christ saying: 'Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' When the law so overwhelms you that everything seems utterly hopeless, and it drives you to Christ to seek help from Him, then the law is being used rightly — and through the Gospel it plays a part in leading to justification. This is the best and most perfect use of the law.

Paul therefore now begins again to discuss the law and define what it is, taking his starting point from what he said earlier — that the law does not justify. When reason hears this, it immediately concludes: then God gave the law for nothing. It was therefore necessary to define the law rightly and to show what it is and how it is to be understood, so that it is neither taken more broadly nor more

narrowly than it should be. No law, he says, is by itself necessary for justification. Therefore, when we are discussing righteousness, life, and eternal salvation, the law must be completely set aside, as if it never existed or never would exist — as though it were nothing at all. When it comes to justification, no one can push the law far enough out of sight, or fix his gaze solely and sufficiently on God's promise. That is why I said earlier that the law and the promise must be kept far apart in the realm of inner experience and the inward person, even though they are closely joined together in the same person.

Verse 19. Until the Seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

Paul does not make the law permanent. He says it was given and added to the promises on account of transgressions — to restrain them outwardly in civil life, but especially to reveal and increase them spiritually. And it was added not permanently but for a time. Here it is important to know how long the law's power and tyranny — which exposes sin, shows us what we truly are, and reveals God's wrath — should continue. Those whose hearts are truly touched by these things would quickly perish unless they received comfort. So if the days of the law were not limited, no one would be saved. A time must therefore be set, and limits placed on the law, beyond which it may not reign. How long then should the law's dominion last? Until the Seed comes — the Seed of which it is written: 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' The law's tyranny must continue until the fullness of time and the Seed of blessing arrives — not to bring this Seed or give righteousness, but to restrain the rebellious and stubborn in the civil realm, holding them in a kind of prison, and then spiritually to convict

them of sin, humble them, and terrify them — and when they have been humbled and broken down, to compel them to look up to that blessed Seed.

We can understand the duration of the law both in a literal and in a spiritual sense. Literally: the law continued until the time of grace. As Christ says: 'The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.' From John's time until now, the kingdom of heaven has been advancing forcefully, and forceful people lay hold of it. In that time Christ was baptized and began to preach. And at that time also, the law and all the ceremonies of Moses came to an end in their literal sense.

Spiritually, the law should not reign in the conscience any longer than until the appointed time of the blessed Seed. When the law shows me my sin, terrifies me, and reveals the wrath and judgment of God — so that I begin to tremble and despair — at that point the law has reached its limit, its set time and appointed end, and must cease to exercise its tyranny. For it has done its work sufficiently: it has revealed the wrath of God and terrified enough. At that point we must say: 'Now stop, law — you have done enough. You have terrified and tormented me enough. All your floods have rolled over me, and your terrors have overwhelmed me. Lord, do not turn Your face away in wrath from Your servant; do not rebuke me in Your anger.' When these terrors and anguish come, the time and hour of the blessed Seed has arrived. Let the law now give way — for it was added to reveal and increase transgressions, but only until the blessed Seed would come. When that Seed has come, let the law stop revealing sin and terrifying any further, and let it yield its kingdom to another: to the blessed Seed, which is Christ. He has gracious lips that do not accuse or terrify, but speak of far

greater things than the law — namely, grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, and victory over sin, death, the devil, and damnation, won by His death and suffering for all who believe.

With the words 'until the Seed would come, to whom the blessing was promised,' Paul shows how long the law would endure — both literally and spiritually. In the literal sense it came to an end when the blessed Seed came into the world, took on our flesh, gave the Holy Spirit, and wrote a new law in our hearts. But the spiritual dominion of the law does not end all at once — it continues to operate deep within the conscience. Therefore it is very difficult for someone exercised in the spiritual use of the law to see the end of the law. In the midst of those terrors and the acute sense of sin, the mind cannot grasp the hope that God is merciful and will forgive sins for Christ's sake. It perceives only that God is angry with sinners, accusing and condemning them. If faith does not come to lift up the poor afflicted conscience — or if there is not, as Christ says, a faithful brother present where two or three are gathered in His name, ready to comfort someone crushed and beaten down by the law — despair and death must follow. Therefore it is a dangerous thing to be alone. 'Woe to the one who is alone when he falls,' says the Preacher, 'for there is no one to lift him up.' Those who established the cursed life of monastic solitude gave opportunity for thousands to fall into despair. If a person were to withdraw from others for a day or two to pray — as we read of Christ, who sometimes went alone to the mountain and spent nights in prayer — there would be no danger in that. But forcing people to live in permanent solitude was a device of the devil himself. For when a person is tempted and is alone, he cannot lift himself up — not even in the smallest temptation.

Verse 19. And it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator.

This is a brief digression that Paul neither explains nor develops, but only touches on in passing before moving on. He immediately returns to his main argument with the question: Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? The occasion for the digression was this: he had just been discussing the difference between the law and the Gospel — specifically, that the law added to the promises differs from the Gospel not only in terms of time, but also in its source and primary cause. The law was delivered through angels (Hebrews 1), but the Gospel through the Lord Himself. Therefore the Gospel is far more excellent than the law. The law is the voice of servants; the Gospel is the voice of the Lord Himself. To diminish the authority of the law and to exalt the Gospel, Paul notes that the law was a teaching given to last only a short time — it endured only until the fullness of the promise, that is, until the blessed Seed came and fulfilled the promise. The Gospel, by contrast, is forever. For all believers from the beginning of the world have had one and the same Gospel, and through it they were saved. The law is therefore far inferior to the Gospel — it was established through angels, who are only servants, and lasted only a short time, whereas the Gospel was established by the Lord Himself and endures forever (Hebrews 1) — for it was promised before all ages (Titus 1:2).

Furthermore, the word of the law was delivered not only through angels as servants, but also through a servant far lower than the angels — a human being, as Paul says here: by the hand of a mediator, that is, Moses. Christ, by contrast, is not a servant but the Lord Himself. He is not a mediator between God and people

under the law as Moses was — He is the mediator of a better covenant. The law was therefore established through angels as servants. For Moses and the people heard God speaking from Mount Sinai — that is, they heard angels speaking in God's name. This is why Stephen says in Acts 7: 'You received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you did not keep it.' The text in Exodus 3 also makes plain that the Angel appeared to Moses in a flame of fire and spoke to him from the midst of the burning bush.

Paul indicates that Christ is the mediator of a far better covenant than Moses. He alludes here to the account in Moses about the giving of the law — how Moses led the people out of their tents to meet God and stationed them at the foot of Mount Sinai. What they saw there was heavy and terrifying. The entire mountain was engulfed in blazing fire. When the people saw this, they began to tremble, fearing they would be suddenly destroyed in this dreadful storm. Unable to endure the law thundering out of Mount Sinai — for that terrifying voice of the law would have killed them — they said to their mediator Moses: 'Come here and hear what the Lord says, and speak it to us.' Moses answered: 'I myself stand between God and you as a mediator.' These passages make it plain that Moses was appointed as a mediator between the people and the speaking law.

Paul uses this account to argue that righteousness cannot come through the law. How can the law justify, he asks in effect, when the entire people of Israel — though purified and sanctified — along with Moses himself, their mediator between God and the people, were afraid and trembling at the voice of the law, as the letter to the Hebrews confirms? All that was present was fear and trembling. What kind of righteousness and holiness is it to be un-

able to bear, indeed unable or willing to hear the law — to flee from it and hate it so completely that nothing in the world is hated and loathed more? As the account plainly shows, when the people heard the law, they hated nothing so much as the law itself, and would rather have chosen death than to hear it.

When sin is exposed by the sharp light the law shines into the heart, there is nothing more odious or more unbearable to a person than the law. He would choose death rather than be forced to endure even a little of these terrors of the law — and this is the clearest possible proof that the law does not justify. For if the law did justify, people would love it, would delight in it, and would be lifted up and comforted by the gracious and free mercy of God. Therefore the law does not justify.

If the law were to serve my natural desires — that is, if it approved my hypocrisy, my presumption, and my confidence in my own righteousness; if it said that through its help alone, without the mercy of God and faith in Christ, I could be justified before God (as the whole world naturally imagines of the law); and if it further said that God is quieted and won over by works and is obligated to reward those who perform them, so that I, needing nothing from God, could be my own god, merit grace by my own works, and save myself by my own merits, setting aside my Savior Christ — if the law did all this, it would be sweet, pleasing, and delightful indeed. Reason is so very good at flattering itself. But this pleasant impression would only last until the law came into its proper use and function. Then it would become plain that reason cannot endure the law's bright and piercing light. At that point some Moses would need to step in as a mediator — and yet even that would be without lasting effect, as I will explain.

This is the point of the passage in 2 Corinthians 3 about Moses' covered face, where Paul draws from Exodus 34 to show that the Israelites not only failed to understand the true and spiritual use of the law — they could not even bear it. First, Paul says they could not look to the end of the law because of the veil Moses put over his face. Nor could they look at Moses' face when it was uncovered, because of the glory of his countenance. So when Moses went to speak with them, he covered his face with a veil — for without that veil they could not bear to hear him talk. That is, they could not even hear Moses, their own human mediator, unless another mediator was placed between them — the veil. If they could not bear the voice of Moses, a mere man and their own mediator, except with his face covered, how could they bear the voice of God or of an angel? Therefore, unless the blessed Seed comes to lift up and comfort the one who has heard the law, that person perishes through despair — detesting the law, hating and blaspheming God, and offending more and more against Him every day. For the fear and confusion of conscience produced by the law: the deeper it goes and the longer it lasts, the more it increases hatred and blasphemy against God.

This account therefore teaches us what free will can actually do. The people were struck with fear, they trembled, and they fled. Where was free will then? Where was the good will, the good intention, the sound judgment of reason that the papists boast about so much? What good was free will in these sanctified and holy people? It was useless. It blinded their reason and perverted their will. It did not welcome, greet, or embrace with joy the Lord coming in thunder, lightning, and fire on Mount Sinai. It could not hear the voice of the Lord — instead it said: 'Let not the Lord speak to us,

lest we die.' We see what the strength of free will amounts to in the children of Israel, who — though cleansed and sanctified — could not hear a single word of the law. The lofty praises the papists lavish on their free will are therefore nothing more than empty fantasies and foolish dreams.

Verse 20. Now a mediator is not for one party only.

Here Paul compares the two mediators with remarkable brevity — yet in a way that fully satisfies the attentive reader. Since the word 'mediator' is a general term, the reader immediately understands that Paul is speaking of the concept of a mediator broadly, not of Moses alone. 'A mediator,' he says, 'is not a mediator for one party only' — the word necessarily involves two parties: the one who has been offended and the one who is the offender, of whom one needs intercession and the other does not. A mediator therefore stands between two parties — specifically, two parties who are at odds with each other. In this general sense, Moses is a mediator — he performs the function of a mediator between the law and the people, who cannot endure the law's true and spiritual force. The law must therefore take on a new face and its voice must be changed — that is, the law's voice must be softened, or the law must be made livable in outward practice, putting on a veil, so that it becomes tolerable and the people can hear it through the voice of Moses.

With this veil over it, the law no longer speaks in its own majesty but through Moses' mouth. In this form it no longer performs its proper function — it no longer terrifies the conscience. This is why people neither understand nor take it seriously: they become careless, lazy, and presumptuous hypocrites. And yet one of two things must happen: either the law must be without its

proper force and covered with a veil — but then, as I have said, it produces only hypocrites — or it must operate in its full force without the veil, and then it kills. A person's heart cannot endure the law in its true use without the veil. Therefore if you look at the end of the law without the veil, you must either take hold of the blessed Seed by faith — that is, you must look past the end of the law to Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, and who says to you: 'The law has terrified you enough. Take heart, my son — your sins are forgiven you' — or else you must have Moses as your mediator, with his veil.

This is why Paul says: 'A mediator is not a mediator of one.' Moses could not be a mediator for God alone — God needs no mediator. Nor is Moses a mediator for the people alone — he performs the office of a mediator between God and the people, who were in conflict with God. For it is the mediator's job to satisfy the offended party and reconcile the offender to him. Yet Moses is a mediator only in the sense I described: he changes the voice of the law and makes it tolerable so the people can hear it — but he gives them no power to actually fulfill it. In short, he is only a mediator of the veil, giving no power to perform the law — only the outward form of it. Therefore his followers, in that he is a mediator of the veil, must always remain hypocrites.

But consider what would have happened if the law had been given without Moses — either before or after him — with no mediator at all, and the people had been prevented from either fleeing or having anyone to stand between them and the law. Either the people, crushed by unbearable terror, would have immediately perished — or if they survived, some other mediator would have had to come, one who stood between the law and the people, so

that the people might be preserved, the law remain in its full force, and a reconciliation be made between the law and the people. Moses steps in at that moment and becomes the mediator — he puts on the veil and covers his face. But he cannot free people's consciences from the anguish and terror the law produces. Therefore when a person, in the hour of death or in the conflict of conscience, feels God's wrath and judgment for the sin that the law exposes and increases — and a mediator is needed to keep him from despair — Moses with his veil must be set aside. He needs a mediator who can say to him: 'Although you are a sinner, you will not be destroyed — you will not die, even though the law with its wrath and curse still stands.'

This mediator is Jesus Christ. He does not change the voice of the law or hide it behind a veil as Moses did, nor does He lead me out of the law's sight. Instead He places Himself against the wrath of the law, removes it, and satisfies the law in His own body, Himself. Through the Gospel He says to me: 'Yes, the law threatens you with God's wrath and eternal death. But do not be afraid. Do not run. Stand firm. I fulfill and perform everything for you; I satisfy the law on your behalf.' This is a mediator who far surpasses Moses — He stands between an angry God and the sinner. The intercession of Moses counts for nothing here; he has done his work, and he and his veil have now passed away. Here the utterly desperate sinner — or a person facing death — and an offended and angry God stand face to face. A far greater mediator than Moses is therefore needed: one who can satisfy the law, take away its wrath, and reconcile to God the poor sinner who is miserable and guilty of eternal death.

Paul speaks of this mediator briefly when he says: 'A mediator is not a mediator for one party only.' For the word 'mediator' properly means someone who acts between the offended party and the offender. We are the offenders; God with His law is the offended party. The offense is so great that God cannot simply overlook it, and we cannot make satisfaction for it. Therefore between God — who in Himself is but one — and us, there is a devastating rift. Furthermore, God cannot revoke His law — He requires it to be observed and kept. And we who have broken the law cannot flee from God's presence. Christ has therefore placed Himself as mediator between two parties who are utterly and eternally opposed — and He has reconciled them. How did He do this? As Paul says elsewhere, He canceled the written record of debt that stood against us — the record of legal demands that condemned us — and nailed it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in Himself. He is therefore a mediator not for one party but for two parties who were completely at odds.

This is also a powerful point that refutes and demolishes the righteousness of the law and teaches us that when it comes to justification, the law must be completely set aside. The very word 'mediator' provides ample reason to conclude that the law does not justify — for if it did, why would we need a mediator? Since human nature cannot even bear to hear the law, it is far less able to fulfill it or come to agreement with it.

The teaching I repeat so often — and keep hammering into your heads at the risk of becoming tedious — is the true teaching about the law, which every Christian should learn carefully, so that he can truly define what the law is, what its proper use and func-

tion is, what its limits are, what its power is, how long it lasts, and what its end is. The law produces an effect that is completely opposite to what all people naturally assume — for this deadly and destructive belief that the law justifies is deeply rooted in human nature. I therefore fear that after we are gone, this teaching will be darkened and obscured again. For the world must be filled with terrible darkness and error before the last day comes.

Therefore, let those who are able to understand this do so: in true Christian theology, and by its proper definition, the law does not justify — it produces exactly the opposite effect. It shows and exposes us for what we are. It sets God before us in His anger. It reveals God's wrath, terrifies us, and not only exposes sin but powerfully increases it — so that what was once a small sin, now brought to light by the law, becomes exceedingly sinful. A person then begins to hate the law, to flee from it, and with a deep and total hatred to loathe God who made the law. This is not to be justified by the law — even reason is forced to admit this — but to commit a double sin against it. First, having a will so opposed to the law that you cannot even hear it, and doing the opposite of what it commands. Second, hating the law so deeply that you wish it were abolished together with God Himself, its perfectly good and holy Author.

What greater blasphemy or more horrible sin can be imagined than hating God? To loathe His law and be unable to bear hearing it — even though it is good and holy? The account makes it plain that the people of Israel refused to hear that excellent law, those holy and most gracious words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. I show lovingkind-

ness to thousands. Honor your father and your mother, that it may go well with you and that you may live long on the earth' — and that they needed a mediator. They could not endure this most excellent, perfect, and divine wisdom — this most gracious, sweet, and comforting teaching. 'Do not let the Lord speak to us,' they said, 'lest we die. Speak to us yourself.' It is a remarkable thing that a person cannot hear what is his entire happiness — namely, that he has a God, and a merciful God, who will show him lovingkindness for thousands of generations. And that he cannot bear what is his chief safety, protection, and defense: 'You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal' — for by these words the Lord has surrounded and protected a person's life, his wife, his children, and his goods, as with a wall, against the violence and wrongdoing of the wicked.

The law can therefore do nothing except this: by its light it illuminates the conscience so it recognizes sin, death, judgment, and the hatred and wrath of God. Before the law comes, I feel secure and sense no sin. But when the law comes, sin, death, and hell are revealed to me. This is not being made righteous — it is being made guilty, an enemy of God, condemned to death and hellfire. The main work of the law in true Christian theology is therefore to make people not better but worse — that is, to show them their sin, so that through that knowledge they may be humbled, terrified, crushed, and broken, and by this means driven to seek comfort and come to the blessed Seed.

Verse 20. But God is one.

God offends no one and therefore needs no mediator. But we offend God and therefore we need a mediator — not Moses, but Christ, who speaks far better things on our behalf. Here Paul has

been on his digression; now he returns to his main point.

Verse 21. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?

Paul said earlier that the law does not justify. Should we therefore abolish the law? Not at all — it brings a certain benefit. What benefit? It brings people to knowledge of themselves — it exposes and increases sin. Now another objection arises. If the law does nothing but make people worse by showing them their sin, then it seems to work against God's promises. For it seems that God is only provoked to anger through the law, and therefore neither cares for nor fulfills His promises. 'We Jews believed the opposite,' the objector says: 'We thought we were held in check and disciplined by the law so that God, moved by our effort, would hasten to fulfill His promise — and that through this discipline we might earn the promise.'

Paul answers: Not at all. In fact, with regard to the promise, the law is more of a hindrance. For human reason offends God — who so faithfully promises — when it refuses to hear His good and holy law. It says: 'Do not let the Lord speak to us.' How could God fulfill His promise to those who not only reject His law and discipline but flee from it with deep hatred? Here, then — as I said — the objection arises: the law seems to hinder God's promises. Paul touches on this objection briefly and answers it quickly:

Verse 21. May it never be!

Why not? First, because God does not make promises to us because of our worthiness, our merits, or our good works. Everything He does flows from His pure goodness and immeasurable mercy in Christ. He did not say to Abraham: 'All nations shall be blessed through you because you kept the law.' Rather — as Joshua 24

records — when Abraham was still uncircumcised, had no law, and was still an idolater, God said to him: 'Go out of your own land. I will be your protector.' And: 'In your seed all nations shall be blessed.' These are unconditional and pure promises — freely given to Abraham by God, with no conditions attached and no consideration of works either before or after.

This is Paul's argument especially against the Jews, who believe God's promises are hindered by their sins. God does not delay His promises because of our sins, Paul says, nor does He hasten them because of our righteousness and merits. He takes neither into account. Therefore, even if we become worse and more sinful, and are driven by the law into greater contempt and hatred of God, this does not move God to delay His promise. For His promise does not rest on our worthiness but on His goodness and mercy alone. So when the Jews say, 'The Messiah has not yet come because our sins are hindering Him,' that is a detestable lie — as if God would become unfaithful because of our sins, or become a liar because we are liars. He remains always just and true. His faithfulness alone is the reason He accomplishes and keeps His promise.

Furthermore, although the law reveals and increases sin, it is not against God's promises — in fact it confirms them. In its proper work and end, it humbles a person and prepares him — when he uses the law rightly — to sigh and seek for mercy. For when sin is revealed and increased by the law, a person begins to see the wickedness and hatred of the human heart against the law and against God its author. He feels that he not only fails to love God but actually hates and blasphemes the God who is full of goodness and mercy, and His law which is just and holy. He is compelled to confess that there is nothing good in him. Cast down

and humbled by the law, he acknowledges himself to be utterly miserable and condemned. When the law has brought a person to this place — to acknowledge his own corruption and confess his sin from the bottom of his heart — it has done its work truly, and its time is finished and ended. Now is the time of grace, for the blessed Seed to come and lift up the one who has been cast down and humbled by the law.

In this way the law is not against God's promises. First, the promise does not depend on the law at all, but only on God's faithfulness and mercy. Second, when the law reaches its chief end and purpose, it humbles a person and in humbling him makes him sigh and groan and reach out to the mediator for help. It makes God's grace and mercy exceedingly sweet and comforting — as Psalm 109 says: 'Your mercy is sweet' — and makes His gift precious and immeasurable. By this means it prepares us and makes us ready to receive Christ. As the poet says: He who has not tasted bitter things has not earned the right to taste sweeter ones.

Hunger is the best seasoning. Just as dry ground longs for rain, the law makes troubled and afflicted souls thirst for Christ. To such souls, Christ tastes sweet. He is nothing to them but joy, comfort, and life. This is where Christ and His gift begin to be truly known.

This is the chief use of the law: when it humbles a person and makes him thirst for Christ. Christ calls for thirsty souls — those He lovingly and graciously draws to Himself when He says: 'Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). He delights to water dry and parched ground. He does not pour His water on well-fed, rich ground that is not dry and feels no need of water. His blessings are immeasurable — He

gives them only to those who need them and who, feeling that need deeply, truly desire them. He brings good news to the poor. He gives drink to the thirsty. 'If anyone is thirsty,' says John, 'let him come to Me' (John 7:37-38). He heals the brokenhearted — that is, He comforts those crushed and afflicted by the law. Therefore the law is not against God's promises.

Verse 21. For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would indeed have come from the law.

With these words Paul indicates that no law of itself can give life — it can only kill. Therefore, works done not only according to the Pope's laws and traditions, but also according to God's own law, do not justify a person before God. They make him a sinner. They do not quiet God's wrath — they kindle it. They do not obtain righteousness — they hinder it. They do not give life — they terrify. When Paul says 'If a law had been given that could bring life,' he is plainly teaching that the law does not by itself justify — it produces the exact opposite effect.

Although Paul's words are plain enough, they are dark and completely unknown to the papists. If they truly understood them, they would not speak so highly of free will, natural human strength, the keeping of the counsels of perfection, works of supererogation, and so on. But so as not to appear openly wicked — as brazen unbelievers who deny the words of Christ's apostle — they always have ready their dangerous gloss: they claim that Paul's statements about the law revealing sin and producing wrath apply only to the ceremonial law, not the moral law. But Paul plainly says: 'If a law had been given,' and makes no exceptions. The papists' gloss is therefore worthless. The ceremonial laws were just as much commanded by God and just as strictly kept as the

moral laws. The Jews kept circumcision as precisely as they kept the Sabbath. It is clear enough that Paul is speaking of the whole law.

These words of the apostle are sung and read in the papacy and in all its churches, and yet they both teach and live in direct contradiction to them. Paul says plainly that no law was given to give life. But the papists teach that many laws are given to give life. They may not say this in so many words, but that is their actual position, as their monastic system plainly shows — alongside countless human laws and traditions, works and merits before and after grace, and endless wicked ceremonies and false religious practices they invented themselves. These alone they preached, trampling the Gospel underfoot, and promised grace, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life to all who kept and observed them. This cannot be denied — their books, which still exist, give clear testimony to it.

We, by contrast, affirm with Paul that no law — whether human or divine — gives life. Therefore we place as great a difference between the law and righteousness as there is between life and death, between heaven and hell. The reason we say this is that plain and unmistakable statement of Paul, which says the law was not given to justify, to give life, and to save, but only to kill and to destroy — the opposite of what all people naturally assume. For by nature, people can judge of the law only that it was given to produce righteousness and to give life and salvation.

This distinction between the functions of the law and the Gospel keeps all Christian teaching in its proper place. It also enables a faithful person to judge all ways of life, all laws and decrees of people, and all forms of teaching — and gives them the ability to test all kinds of spirits. The papists, on the other hand, because

they confuse and mix the law and the Gospel together, can teach nothing certain about faith, works, ways of life, or the distinguishing of spirits.

Now, after sufficiently and systematically presenting his refutations and arguments, Paul teaches that the law — when you consider its true and complete purpose — is nothing other than a kind of schoolmaster to lead us to righteousness. For when it does its proper work and function — making people guilty, terrifying them, and bringing them to know sin, wrath, death, and hell — it humbles them and makes them ready to receive the righteousness of Christ. When it has done this, the presumption of personal righteousness and holiness vanishes, and Christ with His gifts begins to become sweet. Therefore the law is not against God's promises — it actually confirms them. True, it does not fulfill the promise or produce righteousness — but through its work and function it humbles us and makes us better fitted and more ready to receive Christ's gift. 'Therefore,' Paul says, 'if any law had been given that could produce righteousness — and through righteousness, life, since no one can obtain life without first being righteous — then indeed righteousness would come by the law.' And if there were any way of life, any work, any religion through which a person could obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and life, then these things would indeed justify and give life. But this is impossible, because —

Verse 22. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin.

Where has it done this? First, in the very promises made to the fathers concerning Christ — as in Genesis 3:15: 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.' And in Genesis 22: 'In your seed,' and so on. Wherever Scripture contains a promise to

the fathers concerning Christ, the blessing is promised — that is, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. Therefore it is clear by implication that those who are to receive the blessing are under the curse — that is, under sin and eternal death. For otherwise, why was the blessing promised at all?

Second, Scripture shuts people under sin and under the curse especially through the law, since revealing sin and producing wrath is the law's particular function — as we have shown throughout this letter, and most directly through Paul's statement: 'As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse' (Galatians 3:10), and by the passage Paul cites from Deuteronomy 27: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the words of this law to do them' (Deuteronomy 27:26). These statements in plain words shut under sin and under the curse not only those who openly sin against the law or outwardly fail to keep it, but also those who are under the law and strive with all their effort to fulfill it — which is what the Jews did, as I have said. Even more so, then, does Paul's statement shut under sin and under the curse all monks, friars, hermits, Carthusians and the like, with their vows, rules, and religious orders, which they credited with such holiness that they imagined a man who made his vow and then promptly died would go straight to heaven. But here you plainly hear that Scripture shuts all under sin. Therefore neither the vow nor the religion of the Carthusian — however angelic it may seem — is righteousness before God, for Scripture has shut all under sin. All are cursed and condemned. Who pronounces this sentence? Scripture. Where? First through the promise: 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head'; 'In you shall all be blessed'; and similar passages. And then through the whole law, whose principal function is to

make people guilty of sin. Therefore no monk, no Carthusian, no Celestine bruises the serpent's head — they remain crushed and broken under the serpent's head, that is, under the power of the devil. Who will believe this?

In short: whatever is apart from Christ and His promise — whether the law of God or the law of man, ceremonial law or moral law — without exception is shut under sin, for Scripture shuts all under sin. And when it says all, it excepts nothing. We therefore conclude with Paul that the laws and governance of all nations, however good and necessary they may be, along with all ceremonies and religions, are and remain under sin, death, and eternal condemnation — unless faith in Jesus Christ accompanies them, or rather goes before them, as the text below will show. We have spoken at greater length on this matter earlier.

Therefore this is a true proposition: faith alone justifies, without works — which our opponents absolutely cannot accept. But Paul strongly concludes here that the law does not give life because it was not given for that purpose. If the law does not justify and give life, then works do so even less. When Paul says the law does not give life, his meaning is that works do not give life either. For it is a greater claim to say the law gives life than to say works give life. If the law itself — even if it were perfectly fulfilled, which is in fact impossible — does not justify, then works certainly do not justify. I therefore conclude that faith alone justifies and brings life, without works. Paul will not accept the addition: 'Faith joined with works justifies.' He argues simply in the negative — as he does in Romans 3, and earlier in chapter 2: 'Therefore by the works of the law no flesh will be justified.' And again here: 'The law was not given to bring life.'

Verse 22. That the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

He said earlier that Scripture has shut all under sin. Forever? No — but until the promise should be given. The promise is the inheritance itself — the blessing promised to Abraham: deliverance from the law, sin, death, and the devil, and the free gift of grace, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. This promise, Paul says, is not obtained by any merit, any law, or any work — it is given. To whom? To those who believe. In whom? In Jesus Christ — the blessed Seed who has redeemed all believers from the curse so that they might receive the blessing. These words are not obscure but plain enough, and yet we must pay careful attention to them and weigh their full meaning. For if all are shut under sin, it follows that all nations are cursed and cut off from God's grace, under His wrath and the power of the devil, and that no one can be delivered except through faith in Jesus Christ. With these words Paul therefore strikes powerfully against the fantastic opinions of the papists and all who seek justification through works, when he says: 'that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to all who believe.'

How we should respond to passages that speak of works and their reward, I have explained sufficiently earlier. The subject before us does not require us to say anything further about works. We have not undertaken here to discuss works, but justification — showing that it is not obtained through the law and works, since all things are shut under sin and under the curse, but only through faith in Christ. When we are outside the topic of justification, we cannot praise and magnify works too highly — those works commanded by God. Who can adequately commend and describe the

worth and fruit of even a single work that a Christian does through faith and in faith? It is more precious than heaven and earth. The whole world cannot adequately repay such a good work. In fact, the world has no understanding to appreciate the holy works of the faithful as they deserve, let alone to reward them. For it either cannot see them, or if it does, it regards them not as good works but as the most wicked and abominable crimes — and removes those who do them from the world as the worst plagues on humanity.

So Christ the Savior of the world, as the repayment for His incomprehensible and immeasurable gifts, was put to the most shameful death of the cross. The apostles, too, bringing the word of grace and eternal life into the world, were counted the scum and outcasts of all humanity. This is the world's repayment for benefits so great and unspeakable. But works done without faith — however holy they may appear outwardly — are under the curse. So far are those who do them from deserving grace, righteousness, and eternal life, that they actually heap sin upon sin. This is how the Pope — that son of perdition — and all who follow him operate. This is how all who seek to earn merit and all heretics who have fallen from faith behave.

Verse 23. But before faith came.

Paul continues explaining the usefulness and necessity of the law. He said earlier that the law was added on account of transgressions — not that it was God's primary intention to give a law that would bring death and damnation. As Paul says in Romans 7: 'Was that which is good made death to me? May it never be!' For the law is a word that shows life and drives people toward it. Therefore it is not given merely as an agent of death. Its primary use and end is to reveal death — so that death may be seen and un-

derstood, and how terrible sin truly is may be recognized. Yet it does not reveal death as though its only aim were to kill and destroy. It reveals death so that when people are terrified, cast down, and humbled, they might fear God. This is what Exodus 20 declares: 'Do not be afraid,' Moses says, 'for God has come to test you, and so that the fear of Him will be before you to keep you from sinning.' The office of the law is therefore to kill — but in such a way that God may bring life again. The law is not given merely to kill: but because a person is proud and imagines himself wise, righteous, and holy, he must be humbled by the law, so that this beast — the presumption of righteousness — may be slain, for without that death, people cannot obtain life.

Although the law kills, God uses this effect — this death — for a good purpose, namely life. For God, seeing that this universal plague of the world — people's presumption of their own righteousness, their hypocrisy, and their confidence in personal holiness — could not be broken down by any other means, determined that it should be destroyed by the law. Not permanently, but so that once it has been slain, a person might be raised up again beyond the law and hear this voice: 'Do not be afraid. I did not give the law and kill you by it so that you would remain in death. I did it so that you would fear Me, and live.' For presuming on good works and righteousness is incompatible with the fear of God, and where there is no fear of God, there can be no thirsting for grace or life. God must therefore have a powerful hammer and a mighty maul to break rocks, and a great burning fire at the height of heaven to overthrow the mountains — that is, to destroy this furious and stubborn beast called self-righteousness, so that when a person is

crushed and broken through it, he might despair of his own strength, righteousness, and holiness, and being utterly terrified, might thirst for mercy and forgiveness of sins.

Verse 23. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

That is: before the time of the Gospel and grace came, the function of the law was to hold us under itself, shut up as in a prison. This is a striking and fitting illustration of what the law does and how it makes people righteous — it deserves careful thought. No thief, murderer, adulterer, or other criminal loves the chains and shackles, the dark and miserable prison where he is held fast. If he could, he would smash the prison walls and break his chains to pieces. While in prison he does refrain from evil — but not willingly, and not out of a love for what is right. It is the prison that restrains him. Locked in chains, he has no regret for his theft or his murder. In fact, he is sorry with all his heart that he cannot rob and kill. He does not hate his crimes — he hates the prison. If he could escape, he would go back to robbing and killing just as he did before.

The Law Shuts Men Under Sin Two Ways, Civilly and Spiritually

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This is the power of the law and law-based righteousness: it compels outward good behavior by threatening death or other punishment to those who transgress it. We obey the law, but only out of fear of punishment — unwillingly and with great resentment. But what kind of righteousness is it when we refrain from evil only because we fear punishment? Law-based righteousness is nothing more than loving sin and hating righteousness — despising God and His law while loving and clinging to what is most horrible and abominable. We obey the law about as gladly as a thief loves his prison and hates his theft.

Yet the law does bring one fruit and benefit — even when people's hearts remain utterly wicked: it outwardly and civilly restrains thieves, murderers, and other criminals to some degree. For if people did not see and understand that sin is punished in this life by imprisonment, the gallows, the sword, and similar means — and after this life by eternal damnation and hellfire — no magistrate could hold back the rage and violence of people through laws, chains, or restraints. The threats of the law strike fear into

the hearts of the wicked and hold them in check to some extent, preventing them from rushing into every kind of wickedness as they otherwise would. Yet they would prefer that there were no law, no punishment, no hell, and ultimately no God. If God had no hell and did not punish the wicked, He would be loved and praised by everyone. But because He punishes the wicked — and all people are wicked — those who are shut under the law cannot help but hate and blaspheme God with deep hostility.

Furthermore, the law shuts people under sin not only outwardly in the civil sense, but also spiritually — the law is a spiritual prison and a kind of hell. When it reveals sin, threatens death, and shows the eternal wrath of God, a person cannot escape or find any comfort. It is not within human power to shake off the horrible terrors the law stirs up in the conscience, or any other spiritual anguish and bitterness. From this come those sorrowful cries of the saints found throughout the Psalms: 'In Sheol who will give You thanks?' and similar laments. For a person is then shut up in a prison from which he cannot escape and sees no way to be freed from these chains — these terrifying torments.

So the law is a prison in both the civil and the spiritual sense. First it restrains and holds in check the wicked, keeping them from rushing unrestrained into every kind of evil. Second, it spiritually shows us our sin, terrifies and humbles us, so that when we have been terrified and humbled, we may come to know our own misery and condemnation. This is the true and proper use of the law — but it is not meant to be permanent. For this being held and shut under the law must last no longer than until faith comes. When faith comes, this spiritual prison must come to an end.

Here again we see that though the law and the Gospel are very far apart in their nature, they are nevertheless very closely linked in the inner experience of a person. Paul shows this when he says: 'We were kept under the law and shut up to the faith which was to be revealed.' It is not enough simply to be shut under the law — if nothing further followed, we would be driven to despair and die in our sins. But Paul adds that we are shut up and held under a schoolmaster — the law — not forever, but to bring us to Christ, who is the end of the law. This terrifying, humbling, and imprisoning must not continue forever, but only until faith is revealed — that is, it continues for as long as is useful and necessary for our salvation, so that when we have been cast down and humbled by the law, grace, forgiveness of sins, and deliverance from the law, sin, and death may become sweet to us — things not obtained by works but received by faith alone.

The person who can, in the moment of trial, join together these two opposing things — who, when thoroughly terrified and cast down by the law, knows that the end of the law and the beginning of grace and faith to be revealed has now arrived — that person is using the law rightly. All the wicked are completely ignorant of this understanding. Cain did not know it when he was shut up in the prison of the law. He felt no terror even after killing his brother — he covered up what he had done craftily, thinking God did not know. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' he said. But when he heard the words: 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground,' he began to truly feel the prison. What did he do then? He remained shut up in prison. He did not join the Gospel to the law but said: 'My punishment is too great to bear.' He only saw the prison and did not consider that his sin was

being revealed to him so that he would flee to God for mercy and forgiveness. Therefore he despaired and turned away from God. He did not believe he was shut up so that grace and faith might be revealed to him — he believed only that he would remain in the prison of the law forever.

The words 'being kept' and 'shut up' are not empty or insignificant — they are true and carry great weight. This being kept and this prison describe the true spiritual terrors, where the conscience is so shut in that in the wide world it can find no place of safety. As long as these terrors last, the conscience feels such anguish and sorrow that heaven and earth — even if they were ten times larger than they are — seem narrower than a mouse hole. The person is utterly stripped of wisdom, strength, righteousness, counsel, and help of any kind. The conscience is an extraordinarily tender thing, and when it is shut up in the prison of the law, it sees no way out. The confinement seems to grow tighter day by day, as if it will never end. For the person feels the wrath of God — which is infinite and immeasurable — and cannot escape His hand, as Psalm 139 witnesses: 'Where can I flee from Your presence?'

Just as a worldly prison is a physical affliction — the one imprisoned cannot freely use his body — so the anguish and trouble of the mind is a spiritual prison, and the person shut up in it cannot enjoy peace of heart or rest of conscience. Yet it is not permanent — even though reason, in the midst of feeling this prison, believes it will last forever. It lasts only until faith is revealed. The poor conscience must therefore be lifted up and comforted like this: 'Brother, you are indeed shut in — but believe that this is not meant to keep you imprisoned forever. For it is written that we are shut up until the faith that will be revealed. You are suffering in

this prison not for your destruction, but so that you may be refreshed by the blessed Seed. You are being killed by the law so that through Christ you may be made alive again.' Do not despair as Cain, Saul, and Judas did — they were shut up, looked no further than their dark prison, and stayed there, and so they despaired. You must take a different path in these terrors of conscience. Know that it is good and right that you are so shut in, confused, and brought to nothing. Use this being shut in rightly — that is, in the way it is meant: so that when the law has done its work, faith may be revealed. For God does not afflict you so that you remain forever in the affliction. He does not kill you so that you stay in death. 'I do not desire the death of a sinner,' He says through the prophet. He afflicts you so that you may be humbled and come to know that you need mercy and the gift of Christ.

This being held in prison under the law must not last forever — it is meant to continue only until faith comes and is revealed. Psalm 147 teaches this beautifully: 'The Lord delights in those who fear Him' — that is, those who are in the prison of the law. And immediately after it adds: 'and in those who wait for His mercy.' We must therefore hold these two things together, though they are as opposite to each other as anything can be. What could be more opposite than dreading the wrath of God, and trusting in His goodness and mercy? One is hell, the other is heaven — and yet they must be closely joined in the heart. In theory and in pure knowledge, a person can combine them fairly easily. But to do so in lived experience and in inner practice — that is the hardest thing of all, as I have often proved by my own experience. The papists and the sectarians know nothing of this. Therefore Paul's words are dark

and entirely unknown to them. When the law reveals their sin, accuses them, and terrifies them, they can find no counsel, no rest, no help or refuge — and fall into despair, as Cain and Saul did.

Since the law is, as has been said, our tormentor and our prison, it is certain that we cannot love it — we hate it. Anyone who claims to love the law is a liar who does not know what he is saying. A thief or robber who said he loved the prison, the chains, and the shackles would show himself to be utterly mad. Since the law shuts us in and holds us in prison, we necessarily become its enemies. In short, we love the law and its righteousness about as much as a murderer loves the dark prison, the tight bonds, and the irons. How then could the law justify us?

Verse 23. And shut up under the faith which was later to be revealed.

Paul says this with the fullness of time in view — when Christ came. But we must apply it not only to that historical moment, but also to the inner life of every person. For what happened historically and in terms of time — when Christ came, abolished the law, and brought freedom and eternal life to light — happens spiritually in every Christian. In the Christian there is always at one time or another the time of the law, and at another time the time of grace. A Christian has a body in whose members — as Paul says elsewhere — sin dwells and wages war. By sin I mean not just the act or deed, but the root and the tree along with its fruit, in the way Scripture speaks of sin. This sin is not only rooted in the baptized flesh of every Christian, but it wages deadly war within it and holds it captive — not necessarily causing it to give consent or carry out the act, but forcefully pressing toward it. For although a Christian does not fall into outward and gross sins like murder, adultery,

and theft, he is not free from impatience, grumbling, and hatred and blasphemy against God — sins entirely unknown to natural reason and the unspiritual mind. These sins compel him, deeply against his will, to loathe the law, to flee from God's presence, to hate and blaspheme God. Just as sexual desire is strong in a young man, the love of glory in a man in his prime, and greed in an old man — so in a holy and faithful person, impatience, grumbling, hatred, and blasphemy against God are powerfully active. There are many examples of this in the Psalms, in Job, in Jeremiah, and throughout all Scripture. Paul, in describing and expressing this spiritual warfare, uses very intense and fitting language — words like fighting, rebelling, holding captive, and so on.

Both of these times — the time of the law and the time of the Gospel — are present in a Christian, with regard to the inner life. The time of the law is when the law troubles me, torments me with heaviness of heart, oppresses me, brings me to knowledge of sin, and increases that sin. This is the law in its true use and perfect work — and a Christian frequently experiences this as long as he lives. So Paul was given a thorn in the flesh — a messenger of Satan to torment him. He would gladly have felt the joy of conscience, the gladness of heart, and the sweet taste of eternal life at every moment. He would gladly have been freed from all trouble and anguish of spirit, and therefore begged that this temptation be taken away from him. Yet it was not removed, and the Lord said to him: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.' Every Christian feels this battle. To speak for myself: there are many hours when I argue and contend with God and resist Him with impatience. God's wrath and judgment displease me, and my impatience, grumbling, and similar sins displease Him.

This is the time of the law, under which a Christian lives as long as he lives in the flesh. For the flesh continually desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh — but more in some people and less in others.

The time of grace is when the heart is lifted up again by the promise of God's free mercy and says: 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you troubled? Do you see nothing but the law, sin, terror, heaviness, despair, death, hell, and the devil? Is there not also grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, comfort, joy, peace, life, heaven, Christ, and God? Trouble me no more, O my soul. What is the law, what is sin, what are all evils, in comparison to these things? Trust in God, who did not spare His own dear Son but gave Him to death on the cross for your sins.' This is being shut under the law in the flesh — not forever, but until Christ is revealed. Therefore when you are beaten down, tormented, and crushed by the law, say: 'Lady law, you are not alone, and you are not everything. Besides you there are far greater and better things — grace, faith, and blessing. These do not accuse me, terrify me, or condemn me. They comfort me, they call me to trust in the Lord, and they promise me victory and salvation in Christ. There is no reason, therefore, for me to despair.'

The person who is skilled in this art can rightly be called a true theologian. The enthusiastic spirits today and their followers — who constantly boast of the Spirit — think themselves highly experienced in it. But I and those like me have barely learned the first principles of it. It is indeed something that can be learned, but as long as the flesh and sin remain, it can never be perfectly learned. A Christian therefore lives in two times. Insofar as he is flesh, he is under the law. Insofar as he is spirit, he is under grace. Sinful de-

sire, greed, ambition, and pride continually cling to the flesh — along with ignorance, contempt of God, impatience, grumbling, and resentment against God when He interrupts and breaks off our plans and projects, or when He does not promptly punish the wicked and defiant. Such sins are rooted in the flesh of the faithful. Therefore if you look only at the flesh, you will always be in the time of the law. But these days must be shortened, or no flesh would be saved. The law must have its appointed time, and that time must come to an end. The time of the law, therefore, is not permanent — it has an end, and that end is Jesus Christ. But the time of grace is eternal. For Christ, having once died, dies no more. He is eternal, and therefore the time of grace is also eternal.

We must not pass lightly over such significant statements as these in Paul, as the papists and sectarians do. They contain words of life that wonderfully comfort and strengthen afflicted consciences. Those who know and understand them well can judge rightly about faith — they can distinguish true fear from false fear, discern all the inner movements of the heart, and judge all kinds of spirits. The fear of God is a holy and precious thing, but it must not always continue alone. It should always be present in a Christian, because sin is always present in him. But it must not stand alone — for then it is the fear of Cain, Saul, and Judas: a slavish and despairing fear. A Christian must therefore overcome fear through faith in the word of grace. He must turn his eyes away from the time of the law and look to Christ and to the faith that is to be revealed. At that point the fear of God begins to become sweet and causes us to delight in God. For if a person looks only at the law and sin — setting faith aside — he will never be able to put away fear, and will eventually fall into despair.

In this way Paul carefully distinguishes the time of the law and the time of grace. Let us also learn to distinguish them rightly — not merely in words, but in lived inner experience, which is a very difficult thing. For although these two things are vastly different in nature, they are most closely joined together in one heart. Nothing is more tightly bound together than fear and trust, the law and the Gospel, sin and grace. They are so united that one is swallowed up by the other. There is no other combination like it.

At the question 'Why then the law?' Paul begins to discuss the law — its use and its misuse — taking his starting point from what he had already established: that the faithful receive righteousness by grace alone and by the promise, not by the law. That discussion raised the question: why then the law? For when reason hears that righteousness and the blessing are received through grace and the promise, it immediately concludes: then the law is useless. We must therefore consider the teaching about the law carefully, so that we know what to make of it and how to judge it rightly. We must not reject the law altogether, as the enthusiastic spirits did — those who in 1525, stirring up the peasants to rebellion, claimed that the freedom of the Gospel releases everyone from every kind of law. Nor must we attribute to the law the power of justification. Both groups err against the law: the one on the right who wants to be justified by it, and the one on the left who wants to be completely free from it. We must keep the middle road — neither rejecting the law nor attributing more to it than we should.

What I have so often repeated about the two uses of the law — the civil and the spiritual — makes it sufficiently clear that the law is not given for the righteous, but as Paul says elsewhere, for the unrighteous and rebellious. Now among the unrighteous there are

two kinds: those who are to be justified, and those who are not. Those who are not to be justified must be held in check by the civil use of the law — they must be bound by the law as wild and untamed animals are bound with ropes and chains. This civil use of the law has no end, and Paul says nothing about it here. Those who are to be justified are exercised by the spiritual use of the law for a time — for the spiritual use does not continue indefinitely as the civil use does. It looks toward the faith that is to be revealed, and when Christ comes it reaches its end. From this we can plainly see that all of Paul's statements about the spiritual use of the law apply to those who are yet to be justified, not to those already justified. For those already justified, insofar as they remain in Christ, are far above all law. The law must therefore be placed on those who are to be justified, to shut them up in its prison until the righteousness of faith comes. Not so they obtain righteousness through the law — that would be a misuse — but so that when they are cast down and humbled by the law, they flee to Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

Now there are three groups who misuse the law. First, all the hypocrites and those who seek justification through works, who imagine that people are justified by the law. This use does not exercise a person or drive him to faith in Christ — it produces instead a complacent, careless, and arrogant hypocrite who swells with pride over law-keeping and blocks the righteousness of faith. Second, those who would exempt the Christian entirely from the law — as the reckless Anabaptists tried to do, which is what led them to stir up the peasant rebellion. There are many of this kind today among those who profess the Gospel with us. Having been freed from the Pope's tyranny through the teaching of the Gospel,

they imagine that Christian freedom means the freedom to live however they wish in a loose and carnal way. These, as Peter says (1 Peter 2:16), use the freedom of the Spirit as a cover for wickedness, through which the name of God and the Gospel of Christ is slandered everywhere. They will in due time suffer deserved punishment for their ungodliness. Third, those who misuse the law are those who, feeling its terrors, do not understand that those terrors are meant to point them to Christ and come to an end there. This misuse causes them to fall into despair — just as the first misuse produces arrogance and presumption in hypocrites.

By contrast, the true use of the law can never be sufficiently valued and praised — when the conscience, shut up under the law, does not despair, but being taught by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit concludes within itself: 'I am indeed shut in as a prisoner under the law, but not forever. This being shut in will turn to my great profit.' How so? Because being shut in this way, I will be driven to sigh and seek the help of One who can rescue me. In this way the law acts as a kind of enforcer that compels the hungry to come to Christ, so that He may satisfy them with His good things. The true function of the law is therefore to show us our sins, make us guilty, humble us, kill us, bring us down to the depths, and strip away all our help, comfort, and support — but all of this for a single purpose: that we may be justified, lifted up, made alive, carried up to heaven, and receive every good thing. Therefore the law does not merely kill — it kills so that we may live.

Verse 24. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ.

Here Paul again joins together the law and the Gospel — which are so far apart in nature — as they relate to the inner life and the affections, when he says: 'The law is a tutor to Christ.' The illustration of the tutor or schoolmaster is worth considering carefully. Although a schoolmaster is very useful and necessary for instructing and raising up children, show me one child who loves his teacher. We can easily guess what feeling the Jews had toward their Moses, and how eagerly they carried out what he commanded. Indeed such was their love and obedience toward him that at every hour — as the accounts show — they would gladly have stoned him to death. It is not possible for the student to love his teacher. How could he love one who keeps him confined — who does not allow him to do what he would gladly do? And if he does anything against the teacher's command, he is immediately rebuked and punished, and is even made to kiss the rod after being beaten. Is this not a fine kind of righteousness and obedience — obeying the master who threatens so sternly and corrects so sharply, and kissing the rod? But does the student do this willingly? The moment the master's back is turned, he breaks the rod or throws it in the fire. And if he had any power over his master, he would not put up with being beaten — he would beat the master instead. And yet the schoolmaster is very necessary for the child — to instruct and discipline him. Without this discipline, instruction, and training, the child would be utterly lost.

The schoolmaster is appointed to teach the child, to raise him up, and to keep him in a kind of confinement. But to what end, and for how long? Is it so that this strict and harsh treatment should continue forever? Or so the child should remain in bondage permanently? Not at all — only for a time, so that this obedience, this

confinement, and this discipline might benefit the child, and in time he might become an heir and a prince. For it is not the father's will that his son should always be subject to the schoolmaster, always beaten with rods — but that through this instruction and discipline he may be made fit and ready to be his father's heir.

In the same way, Paul says, the law is nothing but a schoolmaster — not a permanent one, but one who serves until it has brought us to Christ, as he also said earlier in other words: the law was added on account of transgressions until the blessed Seed would come; and, Scripture has shut all under sin; and, we were kept and shut up until the faith that was to be revealed. The law is therefore not only a schoolmaster but a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. For what kind of schoolmaster would only torment and beat a child and never actually teach him anything? Yet such schoolmasters existed in earlier times, when schools were nothing but prisons and true hells, and schoolmasters were cruel tyrants and butchers. Children were beaten constantly, they learned through endless pain and toil, and few of them came to anything. The law is not that kind of schoolmaster. It does not merely terrify and torment — as the foolish schoolmaster beats his students and teaches them nothing. With its rods it drives us to Christ, just as a good schoolmaster drills and exercises his students in reading and writing so that they come to love learning and knowledge — and afterward take delight in doing freely what they were earlier compelled to do against their will.

Through this striking illustration, Paul shows the true use of the law: it does not justify hypocrites — they remain without Christ, in their pride and false security. On the other hand, it does

not leave those who are truly contrite in death and condemnation — if they use the law as Paul teaches. It drives them to Christ. Those who, in the midst of these terrors, remain stuck in their weakness and do not lay hold on Christ by faith, eventually fall into despair. Paul therefore, through this picture of the schoolmaster, vividly expresses the true use of the law. Just as the schoolmaster rebukes and troubles his students and makes them unhappy — yet not so that this bondage continues forever, but so that it ends once the children are well trained and instructed, and they can afterward freely enjoy their freedom and their father's inheritance without the schoolmaster driving them — so those who are troubled and burdened by the law know that these terrors and troubles will not continue forever. They are being prepared to come to Christ who is to be revealed and to receive the freedom of the Spirit.

Verse 24. That we may be justified by faith.

The law is not a schoolmaster to bring us to another lawgiver who demands good works, but to Christ our Justifier and Savior — so that by faith in Him we might be justified, not by works. But when a person feels the force and pressure of the law, he does not understand or believe this. Instead he says: 'I have lived wickedly — I have transgressed all the commandments of God and am therefore guilty of eternal death. If God would give me a few more years, or at least a few months, I would reform my life and live holily from now on.' Here he turns the true use of the law into a misuse. Reason, overtaken by these terrors and pressures, boldly promises God that it will fulfill all the works of the whole law. From this came so many sects and swarms of monks and religious hypocrites, so many ceremonies and self-devised works to earn grace and forgiveness of sins. Those who devised such things

thought the law was a schoolmaster to lead them not to Christ but to a new law — or to Christ as a new lawgiver, rather than as the one who has abolished the law.

But the true use of the law is to bring me to a knowledge of my sin, to humble me, so that I come to Christ and am justified by faith. Faith is neither law nor work, but a firm confidence that lays hold on Christ, who is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). And how? Not by abolishing the old law and giving a new one, and not by being a judge who must be satisfied by works, as the papists taught. He is the end of the law for everyone who believes — that is, everyone who believes in Him is righteous, and the law will never accuse that person. The law is therefore good, holy, and just — when it is used rightly. Those who misuse it are, first, the hypocrites who attribute to the law the power to justify; and second, those who despair — not knowing that the law is a schoolmaster to lead people to Christ, that is, that it humbles them not for their destruction but for their salvation. For God wounds in order to heal, and kills in order to give life.

Now, as I have said, Paul speaks here of those who are yet to be justified, not of those already justified. Therefore when you reason about the law, you must identify the proper subject on which the law operates — the sinner and the wicked person. The law does not justify that person; it sets sin before his eyes, casts him down, brings him to self-knowledge, shows him hell, and reveals the wrath and judgment of God. This is the law's proper function. Then follows the proper purpose of this function: the sinner must understand that the law does not reveal his sin and humble him so that he should despair, but so that by this accusing and breaking it may drive him to Christ, his Savior and Comforter. When that has

happened, he is no longer under the schoolmaster. This function is very necessary. Since the whole world is overwhelmed by sin, it needs the ministry of the law to expose sin — otherwise no one would ever attain righteousness, as we have explained at length. But what does the law accomplish in those already justified by Christ? Paul answers this in what follows — which amounts to a kind of addition to what he has already said.

Verse 25. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

That is: we are free from the law, from the prison, and from the schoolmaster — for when faith is revealed, the law terrifies and torments us no more. Paul is speaking here of faith as it was proclaimed and published to the world by Christ at the appointed time. For Christ, taking on our flesh, came once into the world, abolished the law with all its effects, and delivered from eternal death all who receive His gift by faith. If you look to Christ and to what He has done, there is now no law. For He, coming at the appointed time, removed the law. Since the law is gone, we are no longer held under its tyranny — we live in joy and safety under Christ, who now sweetly reigns in us by His Spirit. Where the Lord reigns, there is liberty. Therefore, if we could perfectly take hold of Christ — who has abolished the law by His death and reconciled us to His Father — that schoolmaster would have no power over us at all. But the law of the flesh, rebelling against the law of the mind, prevents us from laying hold on Christ perfectly. The lack is not in Christ but in us, who have not yet put off this flesh, to which sin continually clings as long as we live. Therefore, as far as we our-

selves are concerned, we are partly free from the law and partly under it. In spirit we serve, with Paul, the law of God; but in the flesh, the law of sin (Romans 7).

From this it follows that as far as the conscience is concerned, we are fully delivered from the law, and the schoolmaster must not rule in the conscience — that is, he must not afflict the conscience with his terrors, threats, and confinement. And even when he tries to disturb and trouble the conscience, it is not moved. For the conscience has Christ crucified before its eyes, who has removed from the conscience all the functions of the law — 'canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands' (Colossians 2:14). Therefore, just as a virgin has no knowledge of a man, the conscience must not only be ignorant of the law, but utterly dead to it — and the law likewise dead to the conscience. This is accomplished not by works or by law-righteousness, but by faith, which lays hold on Christ. Yet sin still clings to the flesh in its effects, and this frequently accuses and troubles the conscience. As long as the flesh remains, the schoolmaster also remains, and many times he terrifies the conscience and weighs it down by exposing sin and threatening death. Yet the conscience is lifted up again by the daily coming of Christ — who, just as He came once into the world at the appointed time to redeem us from the hard and sharp bondage of the schoolmaster, so He comes to us daily in spirit, so that we may grow in faith and in the knowledge of Him, the conscience may take hold of Him more fully day by day, and the law of the flesh and of sin — with the terror of death and all the evils the law brings — may daily diminish in us. As long as we live in the flesh, which is not without sin, the law often returns and does its work — more in one person and less in another, according to the strength or weak-

ness of their faith. Yet this is not for their destruction but for their salvation. For this is the exercise of the law in the saints: the continual putting to death of the flesh, of reason, and of our own strength — and the daily renewing of the inward person, as it says in 2 Corinthians 4.

We receive the first fruits of the Spirit; the yeast is hidden in the mass of dough, but the whole mass is not yet leavened — it has only begun to leaven. If I look at the yeast alone, I see nothing but pure yeast. But if I look at the whole mass, I see it is not yet all pure yeast. That is to say: if I look at Christ, I am altogether pure and holy and know nothing of the law, for Christ is my yeast. But if I look at my own flesh, I feel in myself greed, lust, anger, pride, and arrogance — along with the fear of death, heaviness, hatred, grumbling, and impatience toward God. The more these sins are present in me, the more Christ is absent from me — or if He is present, He is felt only faintly. Here we need the schoolmaster to discipline and press this stubborn beast, the flesh, so that through this exercise sins may be diminished and a way prepared for Christ. For just as Christ came once bodily at the appointed time, abolished the whole law, conquered sin, destroyed death and hell — so He comes spiritually without ceasing, daily quenching and killing these sins in us.

I say this so you can answer if someone objects: 'Christ came into the world and at once took away all our sins and cleansed us by His blood — what need do we have then of the Gospel or the sacraments?' It is true that insofar as you look at Christ, the law and sin are fully abolished. But Christ has not yet fully come to you — or if He has come, there are still remnants of sin in you. You are not yet completely leavened. For where sinful desire, heaviness of

spirit, and fear of death remain, so too do the law and sin. Christ has not yet fully come. But when He truly comes, He drives away fear and heaviness and brings peace and quietness of conscience. So far as I lay hold on Christ by faith, so far is the law abolished for me. But my flesh, the world, and the devil hinder faith in me and keep it from being perfect. I would gladly have that small light of faith in my heart spread through my whole body and all its members — but it does not happen all at once. It only begins to spread. In the meantime this is our consolation: we who have the first fruits of the Spirit are already beginning to be leavened. We will be thoroughly leavened when this body of sin is dissolved and we rise as entirely new creatures together with Christ.

Although Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever — and all the faithful before His coming had the Gospel and faith — nevertheless Christ came once at the appointed time. Faith also came once, when the apostles preached and proclaimed the Gospel throughout the world. And yet Christ also comes spiritually every day. Faith likewise comes daily through the word of the Gospel. When faith comes, the schoolmaster must give way with his heavy and burdensome work. Christ also comes spiritually when we increasingly come to know and understand what He has given us, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18).

Verse 26. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul, as a true and excellent teacher of faith, always has these words in his mouth: by faith, in faith, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. He does not say: you are children of God because you are circumcised, because you have heard the law and done its works — as the Jews imagine and the false apostles teach. He says:

by faith in Jesus Christ. The law does not make us children of God, and human traditions even less so. The law cannot bring us to a new nature or a new birth. It sets before us that old birth by which we were born into the kingdom of the devil — and in doing so it prepares us for a new birth, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ and not through the law, as Paul plainly declares: 'For you are all children of God through faith.' It is as if he said: Although you were tormented, humbled, and killed by the law, the law did not make you righteous or make you children of God — that is the work of faith alone. What faith? Faith in Christ. Faith in Christ therefore makes us children of God, not the law. John testifies to the same thing in his first chapter (John 1:12): 'To all who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God.' What tongue — of men or of angels — can adequately praise and magnify the great mercy of God toward us, that we who are miserable sinners and by nature children of wrath should be called to this grace and glory: to become children and heirs of God, co-heirs with the Son of God, and lords over heaven and earth — and that through the one means of faith in Christ Jesus?

Verse 27. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

'Putting on Christ' is used in two ways: one according to the law, and one according to the Gospel. According to the law, as in Romans 13: 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ' — that is, follow His example and virtues. Do what He did; endure what He endured. And as 1 Peter 2:21 says: 'Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.' We see in Christ extraordinary pa-

tience, immeasurable gentleness and love, and remarkable humility in all things. This beautiful clothing we must put on — that is, we must follow these virtues.

But putting on Christ according to the Gospel consists not in imitation but in a new birth and a new creation — that is, in putting on Christ's innocence, His righteousness, His wisdom, His power, His healing, His life, and His Spirit. We are clothed with the garment of Adam — a mortal garment, a garment of sin. That is to say: we are all subject to sin, all sold under sin. In us there is horrible blindness, ignorance, contempt and hatred of God — along with evil desire, impurity, greed, and more. This garment — this corrupt and sinful nature — we received from Adam. Paul commonly calls it the old man. This old man must be put off, along with all his works (Ephesians 4; Colossians 3), so that from being children of Adam we may become children of God. This is not done by changing clothes, or by any laws or works, but by a new birth and the renewal of the inward person — which happens in baptism, as Paul says: 'All of you who were baptized have put on Christ.' And: 'He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). Beyond being regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit to heavenly righteousness and eternal life, those who are baptized also experience a new light and a new flame rising within them — new and holy movements of the heart, such as the fear of God, true faith, and firm hope. A new will also begins in them. This is what it truly means to put on Christ according to the Gospel.

Therefore what is given to us in baptism is not the righteousness of the law or of our own works — Christ Himself is our garment. Now Christ is no law, no lawgiver, no work, but a divine and immeasurable gift — given to us by God to be our justifier, our Savior, and our Redeemer. Therefore to be clothed with Christ according to the Gospel is not to be clothed with the law or with works, but with an incomparable gift — that is, with forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace, comfort, joy of spirit, salvation, life, and Christ Himself.

This must be noted carefully because of the vain and enthusiastic spirits who try to strip baptism of its majesty and speak wickedly of it. Paul, by contrast, commends and honors it with great titles, calling it 'the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). And here he says that all who are baptized have put on Christ. It is as if he said: You have been transferred out of the law into a new birth wrought in baptism. Therefore you are no longer under the law — you are clothed with a new garment, the righteousness of Christ. Baptism is therefore a matter of great power and significance. Now, once we have been clothed with Christ as the robe of righteousness and salvation, we must also put on Christ as the pattern and example of imitation. I have treated these things more fully elsewhere, so I will pass over them briefly here.

Verse 28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Here many more categories of persons and offices ordained by God could be added — magistrate and subject, teacher and student, schoolmaster and pupil, master and servant, mistress and

maid, and so on. For in Christ Jesus, all such stations — even those ordained by God — count for nothing. Male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile, prince, subject — all are good creatures of God. But in Christ, that is, in the matter of salvation, they count for nothing, along with all their wisdom, righteousness, religion, and power.

With the words 'There is neither Jew,' and so on, Paul powerfully abolishes the law. For here — that is, when a person is renewed by baptism and has put on Christ — there is neither Jew nor Greek. The apostle is not speaking here of a Jew in terms of his natural identity, but he calls a person a Jew who is a disciple of Moses, is subject to the law, is circumcised, and strives with all his effort to keep the ceremonies the law commands. 'Where Christ is put on,' he says, 'there is no longer Jew, no circumcision, no ceremony of the law' — for Christ has abolished all the laws of Moses. Therefore the conscience that believes in Christ must be so firmly persuaded that the law is abolished — with all its terrors and threats — that it should be as though Moses, the law, and the Jews had never existed. For Christ and Moses cannot be reconciled. Moses came with the law, with many works and many ceremonies. Christ came without any law, without demanding works, giving grace and righteousness freely. For 'the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

When he says 'nor Greek,' he also rejects and condemns the wisdom and righteousness of the Gentiles. Among the Gentiles there were many outstanding men — Xenophon, Themistocles, Marcus Fabius, Attilius Regulus, Cicero, Pomponius Atticus, and many others — who were endowed with remarkable virtues, governed their communities with excellence, and performed great

deeds for the public good. And yet all these were nothing before God, with all their wisdom, power, distinguished acts, excellent virtues, laws, religious practices, and ceremonies. We must not think the Gentiles despised all decency and religion. Indeed all nations of all ages, scattered throughout the world, had their laws, religions, and ceremonies — without which it is impossible for human society to function. All righteousness relating to family life, civil governance, or religious matters — however perfect — counts for nothing before God. What does count? The garment of Christ put on in baptism.

So a servant who faithfully does his duty and obeys his master with great diligence; a free person in authority who governs the community or his own household honestly and with praise; a man who fulfills what belongs to manhood — marrying, managing his household, obeying the authorities, conducting himself decently with everyone; a woman who lives chastely, obeys her husband, runs her household well, and raises her children in godliness — all these are indeed excellent gifts and holy works. And yet all of them count for nothing in comparison to the righteousness that stands before God. In short: all the laws, ceremonies, religious practices, righteousness, and works in the entire world — yes, even those of the Jews, who were the first to receive the kingdom and priesthood ordained and established by God, with their holy laws, religious practices, ceremonies, and worship — none of these take away sin, deliver from death, or obtain life.

Therefore your false apostles are cleverly deceiving you, O Galatians, when they teach that the law is necessary for salvation. By this they rob you of the excellent glory of your new birth and your adoption as children, and call you back to your old birth and

the most miserable bondage of the law. They make you, free children of God, into bound children of the law — insisting on a distinction of persons based on the law. There is indeed a difference between persons under the law and in the world, and rightly so — but not before God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Therefore let the Jews, the Gentiles, and the whole world be silent before God. God has indeed established many ordinances, laws, conditions, and ways of life — but none of these help to earn grace or obtain eternal life. Those who are justified are justified not by keeping human or divine law, but by Christ alone, who has abolished all laws. The Gospel presents Him to us as the one who appeased God's wrath by the shedding of His own blood, and as Savior. Without faith in Him, the Jew will not be saved by the law, the monk by his order, the Greek by his wisdom, the magistrate or master by his upright governing, or the servant by his obedience.

Verse 28. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

These are excellent words. In the world and according to the flesh there is great difference and inequality among persons — and this must be carefully maintained. For if women would be men, if sons would be fathers, if servants would be masters, if subjects would be rulers, there would be nothing but chaos and disorder in every sphere of life. But in Christ there is no law, no distinction of persons — there is neither Jew nor Greek. All are one. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope to which we are called, one Gospel, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, one Christ and Lord of all. The same Christ belongs to me, to you, and to all the faithful — the same Christ that Peter, Paul, and all the saints had. Here

therefore the conscience knows nothing of the law but has Christ alone before its eyes. This is why Paul always adds the phrase 'in Christ Jesus' — for if Christ is taken from our sight, terror follows.

The Scholastics imagine that faith is a quality residing in the heart apart from Christ. This is a devilish error. Christ must be set before you so that you see nothing besides Him, and believe that nothing can be nearer to you or more present in your heart than He is. For He does not sit idle in heaven — He is present with us, working and living in us, as He said in chapter 2: 'I live; yet it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me.' And here again: 'You have put on Christ.' Faith is therefore a steadfast looking that fixes its gaze on nothing but Christ — the conqueror of sin and death, the giver of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. This is why Paul names and proclaims Jesus Christ so frequently in his letters — in almost every verse. He sets Him forth through the word, for there is no other way to grasp Him except through the word.

This was vividly illustrated by the bronze serpent, which is a figure of Christ. Moses commanded the Israelites who had been bitten by serpents in the wilderness to do nothing but fix their gaze steadfastly on the bronze serpent and not look away. Those who did so were healed by that steady, unwavering gaze alone. But those who disobeyed Moses and looked at their wounds rather than the serpent died. In the same way, when my conscience is afflicted or when I am near death, I must do nothing but take hold of Christ by faith and say: 'I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who suffered, was crucified, and died for me — in whose wounds and death I see my sin, and in His resurrection I see victory over sin, death, and the devil, along with righteousness and eternal life.' Beyond Him I see nothing, I hear nothing. This is true faith, con-

cerning Christ and in Christ, by which we are made members of His body, flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones. In Him we live, move, and have our being. Christ and our faith must be thoroughly united. We must be in heaven, and Christ must live and work in us. He lives and works in us not as a mere idea or bare knowledge, but in truth and by a real and substantial presence.

Verse 29. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

That is: if you believe and are baptized into Christ — if you believe, I say, that He is the promised seed of Abraham who brought the blessing to all the Gentiles — then you are children of Abraham, not by nature but by adoption. For Scripture assigns the inheritance not only to children of the flesh but also to children of adoption and promise, and shows beforehand that they will receive the inheritance while the others will be cast out of the house. So in a few words Paul transfers the whole glory of Lebanon — that is, of the Jewish nation — to the desert, that is, to the Gentiles. This passage contains a singular comfort: the Gentiles are children of Abraham and therefore the people of God. But they are children of Abraham not by physical descent but by the promise. The kingdom of heaven, life, and the eternal inheritance therefore belong to the Gentiles. This Scripture signified long before when it said: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' And: 'In your seed all nations shall be blessed.' Because we who are Gentiles believe, and by faith receive the blessing promised to Abraham and fulfilled by Christ, Scripture calls us the children and heirs of Abraham — not according to the flesh but according to the promise. The promise 'In your seed' therefore belongs to all the Gentiles as well, and according to this promise Christ has become ours.

The promise was indeed made to the Jews alone, not to us Gentiles — as Psalm 147 says: 'He declares His word to Jacob; He has not dealt so with any nation.' Yet what was promised comes to us through faith, by which alone we receive God's promise. Although the promise was not formally made to us, it was made with us in view and for us — for we are named in the promise: 'In your seed all nations shall be blessed.' For the promise plainly shows that Abraham would be the father not only of the Jewish nation but of many nations, and that he would be the heir not of one kingdom but of the whole world (Romans 4). Therefore all laws are completely abolished in the heart and conscience of a Christian — yet they remain present outwardly in the flesh. We have spoken at length about this before.

The Fourth Chapter

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Verse 1. Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything. Verse 2. But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

You can see with what intensity Paul works to call the Galatians back, and what strong arguments he uses, drawing on illustrations from experience, from the example of Abraham, from the testimony of Scripture, and from the element of time — so that he sometimes seems to be beginning the whole argument again. He had in effect already finished the discussion of justification, concluding that a person is justified before God by faith alone. But now he brings up the illustration of the young heir, drawn from ordinary civic life, to further confirm his point. By trying every angle, he lays a kind of holy trap for the Galatians. Ordinary people are more readily persuaded by illustrations and examples than by deep and intricate arguments. They would rather look at a vivid picture than read a carefully written book. After having used the illustrations of a human will, the prison, and the schoolmaster, Paul now uses the well-known and familiar example of an heir to move and

persuade them. It is indeed very useful to be equipped with illustrations and examples — something not only Paul but also the prophets and Christ Himself did frequently.

Civil law, he says, establishes that an heir — though he is the rightful owner of all his father's goods — is no different in practice from a servant. He does have a firm hope of the inheritance, but until he comes of age, his guardians and managers keep him under their authority just as a schoolmaster does a student. They do not hand over control of his goods to him but require him to serve, so that he is kept and provided for from his own inheritance like a servant. As long as this bondage lasts — that is, as long as he is under guardians and managers — he differs in no way from a servant. And this subjection and service is actually good for him — otherwise, through foolishness, he would soon squander everything. This captivity does not last forever but has a time fixed and appointed by the father when it must end.

Verse 3. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elementary principles of the world.

In the same way, when we were like young children, we were heirs who had the promise of the inheritance to come — the inheritance to be given through the seed of Abraham, that is, through Christ, in whom all nations would be blessed. But because the fullness of time had not yet arrived, Moses our guardian, manager, and schoolmaster came and held us in captivity with our hands bound, so that we could neither govern ourselves nor take possession of our inheritance. In the meantime, however, just as an heir is cared for and maintained with the hope of freedom to come, so

Moses nourished us with the hope of the promise to be revealed at the appointed time — when Christ would come and by His coming put an end to the time of the law and begin the time of grace.

The time of the law ends in two ways. First — as I said — by the coming of Christ in the flesh at the time appointed by His Father. 'But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law.' He entered the holy place once for all through His own blood and obtained eternal redemption for us. Furthermore, the same Christ who came once at the appointed time also comes to us daily and every hour in Spirit. He once redeemed and sanctified all through His own blood — but because we are not yet fully pure (since remnants of sin still cling to our flesh, which strives against the Spirit) He also comes to us spiritually every day, continually advancing and more fully accomplishing the appointed time of His Father, removing and abolishing the law.

He came in this same way in Spirit to the fathers of the Old Testament before He appeared in the flesh. They had Christ in Spirit. They believed in Christ who was to be revealed, just as we believe in Christ who has now been revealed, and they were saved through Him just as we are — according to the saying: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.' Yesterday, before the time of His coming in the flesh. Today, when He was revealed at the appointed time. Now and forever He is one and the same Christ — for through Him alone all the faithful who have ever lived, who now live, or who ever will live are delivered from the law, justified, and saved.

We too, he says, when we were children, served under the elementary principles of the world — that is, the law had dominion over us, oppressed us, and held us in strict bondage as servants and captives. First, it restrained fleshly and rebellious people from rushing headlong into every kind of vice, for the law threatens punishment to transgressors, and without that fear there is no evil they would not commit. Over those whom the law bridles in this way, it rules and reigns. Beyond that, it spiritually accused us, terrified us, killed us, and condemned us before God — and this was the law's chief dominion over us. Just as an heir is subject to his guardians, is disciplined, and is compelled to obey their rules and carry out their orders — so people's consciences, before Christ comes, are crushed under the harsh bondage of the law: accused, terrified, and condemned by it. But this dominion — or rather tyranny — of the law is not permanent. It must last only until the time of grace. The function of the law is therefore to expose and increase sins — not to produce righteousness; to kill — not to give life. For the law is a schoolmaster leading to Christ. Just as guardians handle a young heir strictly and harshly — ruling him and commanding him like a servant, to whom he must submit — so the law accuses us, humbles us, and brings us into bondage as servants of sin, death, and the wrath of God, which is the most miserable kind of slavery imaginable. But just as the power of guardians, and the submission and bondage of a young heir, are not permanent but last only until the time appointed by the father — after which he no longer needs guardians, is no longer under their authority, and freely enjoys the inheritance — so the law has dominion over us and we are compelled to be its servants and cap-

tives, but not forever. We must always add this clause: until the appointed time of the Father. For Christ, who was promised, came and redeemed us from the tyranny of the law.

The coming of Christ, on the other hand, is no benefit to careless hypocrites, to those who hold God in contempt, or to those in despair who see nothing ahead of them but the law's terrors. The emperors' civil laws are elementary principles of the world in the sense that they deal with worldly matters — with things concerning this present life, such as property, possessions, inheritances, murder, adultery, and theft. This is also the domain of the second table of the commandments. The Pope's canon laws and decrees — which forbid marriage and certain foods — Paul elsewhere calls doctrines of demons. These too are elementary principles of the world, but they wickedly bind people's consciences to outward observances, contrary to God's word and faith.

The law of Moses therefore gives nothing but worldly things — it only reveals, both outwardly and spiritually, the evils present in the world. Yet if it is in its true use, it drives the conscience through its terrors to seek and thirst after God's promise and to look to Christ. But to do this, you need the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit, who will say in your heart: 'It is not God's will that after the law has done its work in you, you should simply be terrified and destroyed. When the law has brought you to the knowledge of your misery and condemnation, God does not want you to despair but to believe in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.' Here there is nothing worldly at work — worldly things and all laws cease, and heavenly things begin to appear. Therefore as long as we are under the elementary principles of the world — that is, under the law, which does not

give righteousness and peace of conscience but instead exposes and increases sins and produces wrath — we are servants, bound, and subject to the law, even though we have the promise of the blessing to come. The law says: 'You shall love the Lord your God' — but the ability to do this, or to lay hold on Christ, is something the law cannot give.

I say this not to despise the law, and neither does Paul mean it that way — the law is to be held in great honor. But because Paul is here dealing with the subject of justification, it was necessary for him to speak of the law as something utterly contemptible and unfit for this purpose. For justification is something entirely different from what the law can do. We cannot speak too humbly or dismissively of the law when we are in the matter of justification. When the conscience is in the conflict, it should think of nothing, know nothing at all, but Christ alone. It should push the law entirely out of its sight and embrace nothing but the promise concerning Christ. This is easy to say — but in the moment of temptation, when the conscience wrestles in the presence of God, actually doing it is the hardest thing in the world. When the law accuses you, terrifies you, shows you your sin, and threatens the wrath of God and eternal death — to then have such strength of faith in Christ that it is as though there had never been any law or any sin, but only Christ, pure grace, and redemption; to be able to say: 'O law, I will not hear you, for you are slow and stammering in speech; besides, the fullness of time has now come, and therefore I am free and will not endure your tyranny any longer' — this is extraordinary. Here one sees how hard it is to separate the law from grace, how divine and heavenly it is to hope even against hope, and how true Paul's proposition is: we are justified by faith alone.

Learn therefore from the apostle's example to speak of the law as dismissively as you can in the matter of justification. Paul calls the law the elementary principles of the world, dangerous traditions, the power of sin, the ministry of death, and so on. If you allow the law to rule in your conscience when you stand before God wrestling against sin and death, the law becomes nothing but a fountain of all evils, heresies, and blasphemies. It only increases sin, accuses and terrifies the conscience, threatens death, and sets God before you as an angry judge who rejects and condemns sinners. Therefore, in the matter of justification, if you are wise, send this stuttering Moses far away from you with his law, and do not let his terrors and threats move you in any way. Treat him there as a heretic, an excommunicated and condemned person — worse than the Pope and the devil himself — someone not to be heard or obeyed under any circumstances.

Outside the matter of justification, however, we should with Paul think respectfully of the law, commend it highly, and call it holy, righteous, good, spiritual, and divine. Outside the conscience we should honor it as a god — but in the conscience it is a devil itself. For in even the smallest temptation it cannot lift up and comfort the conscience. It does the exact opposite: it terrifies the conscience, weighs it down with heaviness, and tears it away from the assurance of righteousness, life, and all goodness. This is why Paul shortly after calls the law weak and worthless elementary principles. Let us therefore not allow the law in any circumstance to rule in the conscience — especially since Christ paid such a great price to deliver the conscience from the law's tyranny. He was made a curse for us so that He might deliver us from the curse of the law. Let the godly therefore learn that the law and Christ are two oppo-

sites that cannot coexist. When Christ is present, the law may under no circumstances rule in the conscience. It must depart and leave the bed — which, as Isaiah says, is too narrow to hold two — and give way to Christ alone. Let Him alone reign in righteousness, peace, joy, and life, so that the conscience may rest and repose joyfully in Christ without any awareness of the law, sin, or death.

Paul deliberately uses the expression 'elementary principles of the world' to greatly diminish and undercut the authority of the law and stir us to attention. For anyone reading Paul carefully, when he hears Paul call the law the ministry of death, the letter that kills, and so on, will immediately think: why does he give such offensive terms — which appear to reason as outright blasphemous — to the law, which is a divine teaching revealed from heaven? Paul answers this by saying the law is both holy, just, and good, and also the ministry of sin and death — but in different respects. Before Christ it is holy; after Christ it is death. Therefore, when Christ has come, we should know nothing of the law except in this one respect: that it has power and dominion over the flesh, to bridle it and keep it in check. Between the law and the flesh — to whom the yoke of the law is hard and burdensome — there is a conflict that lasts as long as we live.

Paul alone among all the apostles calls the law the elementary principles of the world, weak and worthless elements, the power of sin, the letter that kills, and so on. The other apostles did not speak of the law this way. Whoever therefore wishes to be a genuine student in Christ's school should pay careful attention to this manner of speaking used by the apostle. Christ called him a chosen vessel and therefore gave him a uniquely precise and penetrating way of

speaking — above all the other apostles — so that he as a chosen vessel might faithfully lay the foundations of the article of justification and set it forth with perfect clarity.

Verse 4. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law.

That is: after the time of the law had run its course, Christ was revealed and delivered us from the law, and the promise was proclaimed among all nations.

Notice carefully how Paul defines Christ. 'Christ,' he says, 'is the Son of God and of a woman, who for us sinners was made under the law, to redeem us who were under the law.' In these words he presents both the person of Christ and the office of Christ. His person consists of His divine and human nature. Paul makes this plain when he says: 'God sent His own Son, born of a woman.' Christ is therefore truly God and truly man. His office is described in these words: 'born under the Law to redeem those who were under the Law.'

It may seem that Paul here speaks of the Virgin Mary simply as 'a woman,' which troubled some of the early fathers, who would have preferred he call her a virgin rather than a woman. But Paul is treating in this letter the highest and most important subject of all — the Gospel, faith, Christian righteousness, the person of Christ, His office, what He took upon Himself and did for our sake, and what gifts He brought to us miserable sinners. The greatness and wonder of this subject left him no concern for her virginity as such. It was enough for him to declare and preach the immeasurable mercy of God, who willed that His Son should be born of that

sex. He makes no mention of the dignity of her person but only of her sex. By naming the sex, he signifies that Christ became truly and fully human through a woman. As if he said: He was born not of man and woman together, but only of womanhood. Therefore when he says only 'born of a woman,' it is as though he had said 'born of a virgin.' John the Evangelist, when he declares that the Word was in the beginning and was made flesh, says not a single word about His mother.

This passage also confirms that when the time of the law was completed, Christ abolished it and brought liberty to those oppressed by it — but He did not establish any new law in addition to or in place of Moses' old law. The monks and papist theologians blaspheme Christ no less than the Turks who boast of Muhammad as a new lawgiver coming after Christ and surpassing Him. Christ came not to abolish the old law in order to make a new one, but — as Paul says here — He was sent by His Father into the world to redeem those held in bondage under the law. These words portray Christ accurately and clearly — they attribute to Him not the office of making any new law, but of redeeming those under the law. Christ Himself says: 'I judge no one.' And elsewhere: 'I did not come to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Me' — meaning: I came not to bring any law or to judge people by it, as Moses and other lawgivers did. I have a higher and a better office: the law killed you, and I judge, condemn, and destroy the law, and so I deliver you from its tyranny.

We who are older, and who were raised in the harmful teaching of the papists until it took deep root in our very bones, developed an opinion exactly contrary to what Paul teaches here. Though we confessed with our lips that Christ redeemed us from the tyranny

of the law, in our hearts we actually thought of Him as a lawgiver, a tyrant, and a judge — more terrifying than Moses himself. Even today, in such great light of truth, we cannot fully root out this perverse opinion — so deeply fixed is what we learned in youth. You who are young, and not yet infected with this harmful error, can learn Christ purely with less difficulty than we older ones who must work to drive out these blasphemous distortions we formed about Him. But you have not entirely escaped the devil's snares. Though you may not yet be infected with the specific error that Christ is a lawgiver, you carry within you the root from which it grows — the flesh, human reason, and corrupt nature, which can judge Christ as nothing other than a lawgiver. You must therefore strive with all your energy to know and understand Christ as Paul has presented Him here. And if, on top of this natural corruption, corrupt and wicked teachers come along — and the world is full of them — they will amplify this corruption of nature and double the evil. Bad instruction will increase and confirm the dangerous error of blind reason, which naturally judges Christ to be a lawgiver, and fixes it so deeply in the mind that it can never be removed without great effort and struggle.

It is therefore very useful for us to always have before our eyes this sweet and comforting statement and others like it — statements that present Christ accurately and clearly — so that throughout our lives, in every danger, in confessing our faith before tyrants, and in the hour of death, we may boldly and with firm confidence say: 'O law, you have no power over me, and therefore you accuse and condemn me in vain. For I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Father sent into the world to redeem us miserable sinners oppressed by the tyranny of the law. He gave His

life and shed His blood for me. Therefore, feeling your terrors and threats, O law, I plunge my conscience into the wounds, blood, death, resurrection, and victory of my Savior Christ. Besides Him I will see nothing, I will hear nothing.' This faith is our victory, by which we overcome the terrors of the law, sin, death, and all evils — yet not without great struggle. Here, children of God who are daily exercised with serious temptations, you wrestle and sweat in earnest. For often the thought comes to them that Christ will accuse them and argue against them, that He will require an account of their past life and condemn them. They cannot assure themselves that He was sent by the Father to redeem us from the tyranny and oppression of the law. Where does this come from? They have not yet fully put off the flesh, which rebels against the Spirit. Therefore the terrors of the law, the fear of death, and similar grievous and dark thoughts often return, hindering faith from laying hold on Christ's gift — His redemption from the bondage of the law — with the assurance it should.

But how did Christ redeem us? This was how our redemption was accomplished: He was made under the law. When Christ came, He found us all captive under guardians and managers — that is, shut up and imprisoned under the law. What did He do? Although He is Lord of the law, and the law therefore has no authority over Him — for He is the Son of God — He voluntarily subjected Himself to it. Then the law exercised over Him all the jurisdiction it had over us. It accuses and terrifies us, makes us subject to sin, death, and the wrath of God, and by its verdict condemns us. It does this rightly, for we are all sinners, by nature children of wrath. Christ, by contrast, committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth — He was not subject to the law. And yet the

law was no less harsh toward this innocent, righteous, and blessed Lamb than it was toward us cursed and condemned sinners — indeed it was far more brutal. It accused Him as a blasphemer and a troublemaker; it charged Him before God with the sins of the whole world; it so terrified and crushed Him with heaviness and anguish of spirit that He sweated blood — and in the end it condemned Him to death, even the death of the cross.

This was an extraordinary battle — the law, a mere creature, launching its full assault on its Creator, and exercising against the Son of God every tyranny it had exercised against us children of wrath — all of it completely unjustly. Because the law so horribly and wickedly sinned against its own God, it stands accused and condemned. There Christ says: 'O law, you mighty queen and cruel ruler of all humanity, what have I done, that you have accused Me, terrified Me, and condemned Me who am innocent?' The law, which had previously condemned and killed all people, now has nothing with which to defend or excuse itself. It is condemned and defeated in turn, losing all its rights — not only over Christ, whom it so cruelly treated and killed, but also over all who believe in Him. For to those Christ says: 'Come to Me, all who are laboring under the yoke of the law. I could have overcome the law by My absolute power and without suffering, for I am Lord of the law and it has no right over Me. But for your sake — you who were under the law — I subjected Myself to that same prison, tyranny, and bondage, taking on your flesh out of immeasurable love. I allowed the law to have dominion over Me, its own Lord, to terrify Me, and to make Me captive to sin, death, and God's wrath — which it had no right to do. Therefore I have conquered the law by a double

right: first, as the Son of God and Lord of the law; and second, in your person. This is as if you had overcome the law yourselves, for My victory is yours.'

Paul speaks this way everywhere about this extraordinary battle between Christ and the law. To make the matter more vivid and compelling, he often personifies the law — treating it as a mighty figure that condemned and killed Christ, whom Christ in turn overcame by rising from death, conquered, condemned, and destroyed. In Ephesians 2: 'killing the hostility in Himself.' And in Ephesians 4, from Psalm 68: 'You ascended on high, You led captive a host of captives.' He uses the same device in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Colossians: 'He condemned sin through sin.' Through this victory, Christ has banished the law from our conscience so that it can no longer confuse us before God, drive us to despair, or condemn us. It does not stop revealing our sin, accusing us, and terrifying us. But the conscience, taking hold of the apostle's word — 'Christ has redeemed us from the law' — is lifted up by faith and receives great comfort. It even triumphs over the law with a kind of holy boldness, saying: 'I do not fear your terrors and threats. For you crucified the Son of God, and you did it most unjustly. Therefore the sin you committed against Him cannot be forgiven. You have lost your right and sovereignty, and now forever you are not only conquered, condemned, and slain by Christ, but also by me, who believes in Him, to whom He has freely given this victory.' So the law is dead to us forever, as long as we remain in Christ. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

These things also confirm the teaching that we are justified by faith alone. For when this battle was fought between Christ and the law, none of our works or merits came into it — only Christ was there. He took on our person, subjected Himself to the law, and in perfect innocence bore all its tyranny. Therefore the law — as a thief and a condemned murderer of the Son of God — forfeits all its rights and deserves to be condemned in such a way that wherever Christ is present or His name is spoken, the law is compelled to flee, just as the devil, so papists imagine, flees from the cross. Therefore if we believe, we are delivered from the law through Christ, who triumphed over it Himself. This glorious triumph that Christ won for us was not obtained by any works but by faith alone — and therefore faith alone justifies.

The words 'Christ was made under the law' are concise and carry great force — they deserve careful thought. They declare that the Son of God, made under the law, did not merely perform one or two works of the law — He was not only circumcised or presented in the temple, or went up to Jerusalem at the appointed feasts, or lived as an outwardly law-abiding citizen. He endured the full tyranny of the law. For the law, in its primary use and at the peak of its power, turned on Christ and assailed Him so terribly that He experienced anguish and terror unlike anything any person on earth had ever felt. His sweating of blood witnesses to this, as does the angel who strengthened Him, His mighty prayer in the garden, and that sorrowful cry from the cross: 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' He suffered all of this to redeem those who were under the law — those burdened in spirit, in anguish and terror, on the edge of despair, crushed by the heavy

weight of their sins, as indeed we all are. For in our flesh we sin daily against all the commandments of God. Paul gives us great comfort when he says: 'God sent His Son.'

Christ — divine and human, eternally begotten of God and born of the virgin at the appointed time — did not come to establish a new law. He came to feel and endure the full terror of the law and to conquer it, so that He might abolish it entirely. He was not made a teacher of the law but an obedient subject to it, so that through His obedience He might redeem those who were under the law. This is the exact opposite of what the papists teach. They have made Christ a lawgiver — far more severe and demanding than Moses. Paul teaches something completely different here: that God humbled His Son under the law, constraining Him to bear the law's verdict and curse, along with sin, death, and everything that goes with them. Moses, as the minister of the law, sin, wrath, and death, seized Christ, bound Him, condemned Him, and killed Him — and Christ endured it all. Christ therefore stands as the one who suffers, not as an agent who acts. In relation to the law, He is the patient, not the authority. He is not a lawgiver or a judge who applies the law. Rather, by making Himself subject to the law and bearing its condemnation, He delivered us from its curse.

Now, when Christ in the Gospel gives commandments and teaches the law — or rather, expounds it — this belongs to the topic of good works, not justification. Furthermore, teaching the law is not Christ's primary office — the purpose for which He came into the world — but a secondary, incidental one, like healing the sick or raising the dead. These are excellent and divine works, but they are not His chief and defining work. The prophets also taught the

law and worked miracles. But Christ is both God and man, who fought against the law and endured its utmost cruelty and tyranny. By suffering the law's tyranny, He conquered it within Himself. Then, rising from death, He condemned and completely abolished the law — our deadliest enemy — so that it can no longer condemn and kill those who believe. Therefore Christ's true and proper office is to wrestle with the law, with sin, and with death on behalf of the whole world — to suffer and endure all of these, and by enduring them, to conquer and abolish them, thereby delivering the faithful from the law and from every evil. Teaching the law and working miracles are particular benefits of Christ, but not the reason He principally came into the world. In fact, the prophets and especially the apostles performed greater miracles than Christ did (John 14).

Since Christ has conquered the law in His own person, it necessarily follows that He is God by nature. No one — whether human or angel — stands above the law except God alone. But Christ is above the law, for He has conquered it. Therefore He is the Son of God and truly God by nature. If you take hold of Christ as Paul presents Him here, you cannot go wrong or be put to shame. You will also be able to judge clearly all the various ways of life, religions, and ceremonies found throughout the world. But if this true picture of Christ is obscured or distorted in any way, everything falls into confusion. The natural person cannot judge the things of God's law (1 Corinthians 2:14). At this point, the wisdom of philosophers, canon lawyers, and all human thinkers reaches its limit. The law has power and dominion over people, so the law judges people — people do not judge the law. Only the Christian has a true and certain judgment about the law. And what is that

judgment? That the law does not justify. Then why was the law given, if it does not justify? Righteousness before God — which is received by faith alone — is not the final reason why believers obey the law. The reasons are the peace of society, gratitude toward God, and the example of a godly life by which others are drawn to believe the Gospel. The Pope has so thoroughly confused and blended ceremonial law, moral law, and faith together that he has ended up putting the ceremonial law above the moral law, and the moral law above faith.

Verse 5. That we might receive the adoption of sons.

Paul expands at great length on the promise in Genesis 22: 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' Earlier in this letter he called this blessing of Abraham's seed by many names: righteousness, life, the promise of the Spirit, deliverance from the law, the testament, and so on. Here he calls it adoption and the inheritance of eternal life. The single word 'blessing' encompasses all of this. For once the curse — which is sin, death, and everything connected to them — is abolished, blessing takes its place: righteousness, life, and every good thing.

But by what merit have we received this blessing — this adoption and inheritance of eternal life? By none of our own. What can people deserve who are imprisoned under sin, subject to the curse of the law, and worthy of eternal death? We received this blessing freely, though we were completely unworthy of it — yet not without merit. Whose merit was it? Not ours, but the merit of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was made under the law not for His own sake but for ours (as Paul said earlier, that He was made a curse for us), and so redeemed us who were under the law. We have received this adoption solely through the redemption of Jesus Christ the

Son of God — a rich and everlasting merit that is entirely His, whether you speak of merit by fittingness or merit by worthiness, before grace or after it. None of it is ours. Along with this free adoption we have also received the Holy Spirit, whom God has sent into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father,' as Paul now explains.

Verse 6. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.

The Holy Spirit is sent in two different ways. In the early church He was sent visibly and openly. He came upon Christ at the Jordan in the form of a dove, and upon the apostles and other believers in the form of fire. This was the first manner of sending the Holy Spirit, and it was necessary for the early church — it was fitting that the church be established through visible miracles because of unbelievers, as Paul witnesses (1 Corinthians 14:22). 'Strange tongues,' he says, 'are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.' But after the church had been gathered together and confirmed through those miracles, there was no longer any need for this visible sending of the Holy Spirit to continue.

Second, the Holy Spirit is sent through the word into the hearts of believers, as Paul says here: 'God sent the Spirit of His Son.' This sending has no visible form. It happens when, through hearing the external word, we receive an inward warmth and light that changes us and makes us new creatures — giving us a new way of thinking, a new way of feeling, and new spiritual impulses. This change and this new judgment are not the product of human reason or natural ability, but the gift and work of the Holy Spirit. He comes with the preached word, purifies our hearts through faith, and produces spiritual movements within us. There is therefore a great difference between us and those who persecute the Gospel's

teaching by force and cunning. We can, by God's grace, judge clearly through the word what God's will toward us is — as well as all laws, all doctrines, and the conduct of our own lives and the lives of others. The papists and the sectarians, by contrast, cannot judge anything with certainty, because they corrupt, persecute, and blaspheme the word. Without the word, no one can give a reliable judgment about anything.

Even though it may not be obvious to the world that we have been renewed in spirit and that we have the Holy Spirit, our judgment, our speech, and our confession make it plain enough that the Holy Spirit and His gifts are in us. Before this, we could judge nothing rightly. We did not speak as we now do. We did not confess, as we now do in the true knowledge and light of the Gospel, that all our works are sin and deserving of condemnation, and that Christ is our only merit — both before grace and after. So let it not trouble us at all that the world — whose works we declare to be evil — judges us to be dangerous heretics and troublemakers, destroyers of religion, disturbers of the peace, and people possessed by the devil. Against this perverse verdict of the world, let the testimony of our own conscience be enough — the sure knowledge that it is God's gift that we not only believe in Jesus Christ but also openly preach and confess Him before the world. As we believe in our hearts, so we speak with our mouths, according to the psalm: 'I believed, and so I spoke.'

Furthermore, we practice the fear of God and avoid sin as much as we are able. When we sin, we do not sin willfully but out of weakness and ignorance, and we are grieved by it. We may stumble, for the devil lies in wait for us day and night. The remnants of sin still cling to our flesh — so in regard to the flesh, we

are still sinners even after receiving the Holy Spirit. In outward appearance, there is not a great difference between a Christian and an upright, decent person. A Christian's works are simple and ordinary. He fulfills his calling, provides for his household, works the land, gives counsel, and helps his neighbor. People focused on the flesh do not value these things much. They see them as common to all people, even to pagans. The world does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, and so it judges the works of the godly wrongly. The spectacular religious performances of hypocrites and their self-chosen acts of devotion, on the other hand, draw great admiration. People regard these as holy works and spare no expense in supporting them. The works of the faithful, by contrast — though they appear plain and unremarkable on the outside, yet are truly good and accepted by God because they are done in faith, with a glad heart, in obedience and gratitude toward God — these the world not only refuses to recognize as good but actually despises and condemns as wicked. So the world is the last to believe that we have the Holy Spirit. And yet, in times of suffering, of persecution, or of confessing the faith — when we must either surrender our spouse, children, possessions, and life, or deny Christ — it becomes clear that we confess Christ and His word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We should not doubt whether the Holy Spirit dwells in us. We should be firmly convinced that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, as Paul says. If anyone finds in himself a love for the word of God — if he gladly hears, speaks, writes, and thinks about Christ — let him know that this is not the work of his own will or reason but the gift of the Holy Spirit. These things are impossible without the Holy Spirit. On the other side, where hatred and contempt for

the word exist, there the devil — the god of this age — reigns, blinding people's minds and holding them captive, so that the light of the Gospel and the glory of Christ cannot shine in. We see this today in most ordinary people, who have no love for the word and dismiss it with contempt as though it has nothing to do with them. But whoever does feel any love or longing for the word should gratefully acknowledge that this desire has been poured into them by the Holy Spirit. We are not born with this love, nor can any law teach us how to obtain it. This change is simply and entirely the work of the right hand of the Most High. So when we willingly and gladly hear the word preached about Christ the Son of God — who for our sake became man, was made subject to the law, and delivered us from the curse of the law, from hell, death, and condemnation — we can be confident that through this very preaching, God is sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts. It is therefore very important for believers to know that they have the Holy Spirit.

I say this to refute the destructive teaching of the papists, who claimed that no one can know with certainty — no matter how upright and blameless his life may be — whether he stands in God's favor. This commonly accepted principle was a central article of faith throughout the whole papacy. By it they utterly destroyed the doctrine of faith, tormented people's consciences, drove Christ out of the church, obscured and denied all the benefits of the Holy Spirit, and abolished true worship — filling hearts instead with idolatry, contempt for God, and blasphemy. For the person who doubts God's goodwill toward him and cannot assure himself that he stands in God's favor cannot believe that his sins are forgiven, that God cares for him, or that he will be saved.

Augustine says rightly and wisely that every person who has faith can see with certainty that he has faith. The papists deny this. 'God forbid,' they say, 'that I should assure myself that I am under grace, that I am holy, that I have the Holy Spirit — even if I live a godly life and do all good works.' You who are young and have not yet been infected with this destructive opinion — on which the entire papal kingdom rests — take care and flee from it as you would from a deadly plague. We who are older were trained in this error from our youth and soaked in it so thoroughly that it has taken deep root in our hearts. Unlearning it costs us no less effort than learning and laying hold of true faith does. But we must be certain and confident that we are under grace, that we please God for Christ's sake, and that we have the Holy Spirit — for 'if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.'

Therefore, whether you serve as a minister of God's word or as a civil magistrate, you must be firmly convinced that your office pleases God — and this you can never be unless you have the Holy Spirit. You may say: 'I have no doubt that my office pleases God, since it is God's ordinance — but I do doubt whether my person pleases Him.' At this point you must turn to the word of God, which teaches and assures us that not only a person's office but the person himself pleases God. The person is baptized, believes in Christ, has been cleansed of all sins through His blood, and lives in the fellowship of the church. Beyond that, he not only loves the pure teaching of the word but is genuinely glad and delighted when he sees it advance and the number of believers grow. On the contrary, he hates the Pope and all sectarians with their corrupt teaching — in keeping with the psalm: 'I hate those who devise evil, but I love Your law' (Psalm 119:113, 115).

We should therefore be fully assured that not only our office but our person pleases God — and indeed that everything we say, do, or think pleases God, not for our own sake, but for Christ's sake, who was made under the law for us. We are sure that Christ pleases God and is holy. Since Christ pleases God and we are in Him, we also please God and are holy. And though sin still remains in our flesh and we stumble and fail every day, grace is more abundant and stronger than sin. The mercy and faithfulness of the Lord reigns over us forever. Therefore sin cannot terrify us or make us doubt the grace of God working in us. Christ — that mighty conqueror — has fully abolished the law, condemned sin, and defeated death and every evil. As long as He sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us, we cannot doubt God's grace and favor toward us.

Furthermore, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, as Paul says here. Christ is completely certain in His Spirit that He pleases God. Therefore we, having the same Spirit of Christ, must be assured that we are under grace — because of the One who is most certain. This is what I have said about the inward testimony, by which a Christian's heart should be fully persuaded that he is under grace and has the Holy Spirit. The outward signs, as I mentioned before, are these: gladly hearing about Christ; preaching and teaching Christ; giving Him thanks and praise; confessing Him even at the cost of property and life; faithfully doing our duty in our calling as best we can, doing it in faith and joy; not taking pleasure in sin; not meddling in someone else's calling but attending to our own; helping those in need; comforting the sorrowful. Through these signs, as clear effects and evidence, we are fully assured and confirmed that we stand in God's favor. The

wicked also imagine they have these signs, but they have nothing of the kind. This makes plain that the Pope with his teaching does nothing but trouble and torment people's consciences and ultimately drive them to despair — for he not only teaches people to doubt, he commands it. Therefore, as the psalm says (Psalm 5:9): 'There is nothing reliable in what he says,' and in another place (Psalm 10:7): 'Under his tongue is wickedness and harm.'

Here we can see how weak the faith of believers still is. If we could be fully persuaded that we are under grace, that our sins are forgiven, that we have the Spirit of Christ, that we are children of God — then surely we would be joyful and thankful to God for this immeasurable gift. But because we feel contrary things — fear, uncertainty, anguish, and heaviness of heart — we cannot assure ourselves of this. Our conscience even tells us it would be presumptuous and proud to claim this glory. Therefore, if we want to understand this rightly, we must put it into practice — for without experience and practice it can never truly be learned.

Let every person therefore practice so that his conscience becomes fully assured that he stands in God's favor and that his person and works please God. If he feels any wavering or doubt, let him exercise his faith, fight against that doubt, and press toward greater certainty — so that he can say: 'I know I am accepted, and I have the Holy Spirit — not because of my own worthiness, works, or merit, but for Christ's sake, who in His immeasurable love toward us made Himself subject to the law and took away the sins of the world.' 'I believe in Him.' 'If I am a sinner and make mistakes, He is righteous and cannot err.' 'I gladly hear, read, sing, and write

about Him, and I desire nothing more than for His Gospel to be known throughout the world and for many to be converted to Him.'

These things plainly show that the Holy Spirit is present with us and in us. Such things are not produced in the heart by human strength, nor are they achieved through diligence, effort, or labor. They come through Christ alone, who first makes us righteous through the knowledge of Him in His holy Gospel, then creates a new heart in us, produces new spiritual movements, and gives us the assurance that we please the Father for His sake. He also gives us true discernment, so that we come to understand and appreciate what we previously did not know or outright despised. We must therefore fight against this doubting, overcoming it more and more each day, and pressing toward a full and settled assurance of God's favor — rooting out from our hearts that cursed notion, which has infected the whole world, that a person ought to remain uncertain about God's grace. For if we doubt whether we are under grace, and whether we please God for Christ's sake, we are in effect denying that Christ has redeemed us and rejecting all His benefits. You who are young can more easily grasp this pure Gospel teaching and leave this destructive error behind, because you have not yet been poisoned by it.

Verse 6. Crying, 'Abba! Father!'

Paul could have said: 'God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, calling Abba Father.' But he does not say that. Instead he says 'crying, Abba Father' — to describe the temptation of the Christian who is still weak and believes only feebly. In Romans 8, Paul calls this crying 'groanings too deep for words.' He writes

there: 'The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.'

It is a special comfort that Paul says the Spirit of Christ is sent into our hearts crying 'Abba Father,' and that He helps our weakness by interceding for us with groanings too deep for words. Whoever could truly believe this would never be overcome by any affliction, however great. But many things hinder this faith in us. First, our hearts are born in sin. Beyond that, there is this evil naturally woven into us: we doubt God's goodwill toward us and cannot assure ourselves that we please Him. On top of all this, the devil our enemy prowls about with terrifying roars, saying: 'You are a sinner — therefore God is angry with you and will destroy you forever.' Against these horrible, crushing roars, we have nothing to hold on to and lean upon except the word, which sets Christ before us as the conqueror over sin, death, and every evil. But to hold fast to the word in the midst of these temptations and terrors of conscience — that is where all the difficulty lies. In those moments, Christ appears to no sense at all. We cannot see Him. The heart feels no sense of His presence or help. In fact it seems as if Christ is angry with us and has abandoned us. When a person is tempted and afflicted, he feels the power of sin and the weakness of his flesh. He doubts. He feels the fiery arrows of the devil, the terror of death, and the anger and judgment of God. All of these cry out against him horribly, so that he sees nothing but despair and eternal death. Yet even in the midst of these terrors of the law, the thunderings of sin, the assaults of death, and the roaring of the devil, the Holy Spirit — Paul says — cries in our hearts: 'Abba

Father.' And this cry rises above all those mighty and terrible cries of the law, sin, death, and the devil. It pierces the clouds and the heavens and reaches the ears of God.

Paul is showing here that weakness still remains in believers — just as he says in Romans 8: 'The Spirit helps us in our weakness.' Because the feeling of the opposite is so strong in us — we feel God's displeasure more than His goodwill — the Holy Spirit is sent into our hearts. He does not merely sigh and make requests on our behalf; He cries mightily, 'Abba Father,' and prays for us according to God's will with tears and groanings too deep for words. How does this happen? When we are in terror and wrestling in conscience, we do take hold of Christ and believe that He is our Savior — but that is precisely when the law and sin terrify and torment us most. The devil attacks us with all his weapons and fiery arrows, working with all his power to tear Christ away from us and strip away every comfort. We feel ourselves almost overcome and on the edge of despair — for at that moment we are that bruised reed and smoldering wick that Isaiah describes. Yet all the while, the Holy Spirit helps our weakness and intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, assuring our spirits that we are children of God. So the mind, in the midst of terror, looks up to its Savior and High Priest Jesus Christ, overcomes the weakness of the flesh, receives comfort again, and says: 'Abba Father.' This groaning, which we barely notice at the time, Paul calls a crying and unspeakable groaning that fills both heaven and earth. He calls it the crying and groaning of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit stirs it up in our hearts when we are weak and overwhelmed by terror and temptation.

Even when the law, sin, and the devil roar against us with great and terrible cries that seem to fill heaven and earth and far exceed our own faint groaning, they cannot harm us. For the more fiercely they assault, accuse, and torment us with their roaring, the more we groan — and in groaning we take hold of Christ, call upon Him with heart and mouth, cling to Him, and believe that He was made under the law to deliver us from the curse of the law and to destroy both sin and death. When we have taken hold of Christ by faith in this way, we cry through Him: 'Abba Father.' And this cry of ours far surpasses the roaring of the law, sin, the devil, and all the rest.

Yet we are so far from thinking of our groaning in these times of terror and weakness as a cry that we can barely even perceive it as a groan. Our faith, which groans toward Christ in temptation, feels very weak when we judge by our own feelings. This is why we cannot hear this cry ourselves. We have only the word, and when we lay hold of it in the struggle, we catch a little breath — and then we groan. We have a small sense of the groaning, but we cannot hear the cry. Yet He who searches the hearts — Paul says — knows what the Spirit means. To this Searcher of hearts, what seems to us a faint and feeble groaning is a loud and mighty cry, an unspeakable groan — compared to which the terrible roarings of the law, sin, death, the devil, and hell are nothing and cannot even be heard. Paul therefore has good reason to call this groaning of a godly, afflicted heart a cry and an inexpressible groaning of the Spirit. It fills all of heaven, so that the angels hear nothing else.

But in us the feeling is exactly the opposite. It seems to us that our small groaning barely pierces the clouds, and that it is certainly not all that fills heaven before God and the angels. In fact, especially in times of temptation, we think the devil is roaring hor-

ribly against us, that thunder shakes the heavens and the earth trembles, that everything is about to crash down on us, that every creature threatens our destruction, and that hell is gaping open to swallow us. These horrible voices and this frightening spectacle are what we hear and see in our hearts. This is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 12: that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness. For Christ truly reigns and triumphs in us precisely when we are so weak that we can barely groan. Yet Paul says this groaning is, in God's ears, a mighty cry that fills both heaven and earth.

In Luke 18, in the parable of the unjust judge, Christ also calls the groaning of a faithful heart a cry — one that never stops crying to God day and night — where He says: 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. Will God not then bring justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, even if He delays long over them? I tell you, He will bring justice for them quickly.' We in our day, facing such intense persecution and attack from the Pope, from tyrants, and from sectarians fighting against us on all sides, can do nothing but offer up these groanings. These have been our weapons — the artillery by which we have for so many years scattered the plans and schemes of our enemies, and by which we have begun to tear down the kingdom of Antichrist. They will also move Christ to hasten the day of His glorious return, when He will abolish all rule, authority, and power and place all His enemies under His feet. So be it.

In Exodus 14, as Moses stood at the Red Sea, the Lord said to him: 'Why do you cry to Me?' Yet Moses had not cried out at all — he trembled and was nearly in despair, overwhelmed by the situation. It appeared as though unbelief, not faith, ruled in him. He saw the people of Israel completely hemmed in by the Egyptian

army on one side and the sea on the other, with no way of escape. Moses dared not even open his mouth. How then had he cried? We must not judge by the feeling of our own heart, but by the word of God, which teaches us that the Holy Spirit is given to those who are afflicted, terrified, and on the edge of despair — to lift them up and comfort them so that they are not crushed by their temptations but overcome them, though not without great terror and trouble.

The papists imagined that holy men had the Holy Spirit in such a way that they never experienced any temptation. They spoke of the Holy Spirit only in terms of theory and abstract knowledge. But Paul says that Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness, and that the Spirit helps our weakness and intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. We therefore need the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit most when we are weakest and closest to despair — and that is exactly when He is most ready to help. If someone endures affliction with a steady and joyful heart, that is the Holy Spirit doing His work in him. And He works especially and most fully in those who have suffered the most severe terrors and afflictions — those who, as the psalm says, have drawn near to the very gates of hell. Moses is the example I mentioned earlier. He saw nothing ahead but death — in the water and on every side wherever he turned. He was in extreme anguish and despair. Surely he felt in his heart the devil's voice roaring against him: 'All this people will die today — there is no way out. And you are the one who brought them here, by leading them out of Egypt.' On top of all this, the people cried out against him: 'Were there no graves in Egypt? You brought us out here to die in the wilderness! Were we not better off serving the Egyptians than dying out here?' The

Holy Spirit was present in Moses not merely in theory, but truly and powerfully, interceding for him with groanings too deep to express — so that Moses sighed to God and said: 'Lord, at Your command I led this people out. Help us now.' This sighing and groaning to God, Scripture calls a cry.

I have gone into this at length so that the office of the Holy Spirit and the times when He especially exercises it would be plain. In temptation, therefore, we must not judge our condition by our own feelings, or by the cries of the law, sin, and the devil. If we follow our feelings and believe those cries, we will think ourselves completely abandoned by the Holy Spirit and utterly rejected by God. Instead, let us remember what Paul says: the Spirit helps our weakness. He cries 'Abba Father' — that is, He produces in us a faint sighing and groaning of the heart that seems weak to us, but before God is a loud cry and an unspeakable groaning. So in the midst of your temptation and weakness, cling to Christ alone and groan toward Him. He gives the Holy Spirit, who cries 'Abba Father.' That faint groaning is a mighty cry in the ears of God, filling heaven and earth so that God hears nothing else. And it drowns out the cries of everything else.

Notice also that Paul says the Spirit intercedes for us in temptation not with many words or long prayers, but only with a groaning that cannot be expressed. It does not cry out loudly with tears, saying 'Have mercy on me, O God,' but only utters a small sound and a faint groaning — something like 'Ah, Father.' This is only a little word, yet it contains everything. The mouth may not speak it, but the heart speaks it this way: 'Although I am pressed down with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be abandoned and completely cut off from Your presence, yet I am Your child, and

You are my Father for Christ's sake. I am loved because of the Beloved.' This little word, 'Father,' felt truly in the heart, surpasses all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and every great rhetorician who ever lived. This is not something words can express. It comes through groaning, and no tongue or eloquence can put it into words.

I have spent many words establishing that a Christian must assure himself that he stands in God's favor and that the Holy Spirit is crying in his heart. I have done this so that we may learn to reject and completely abandon that diabolical teaching of the whole papal kingdom — the teaching that a person ought to remain uncertain and doubtful of God's grace and favor. If this opinion is accepted, Christ profits no one. Whoever doubts God's favor must also doubt God's promises, and therefore God's will, and therefore Christ's benefits — His birth, suffering, death, and resurrection for us. But there is no greater blasphemy against God than to deny His promises, to deny God Himself and Christ. It was therefore not only extreme foolishness but a horrible act of wickedness that the monks so eagerly recruited young men and women into their monasteries and religious orders — as though these were certain paths to salvation — and then, once they had them, told them to doubt whether God's grace was truly upon them.

Beyond that, the Pope summoned the whole world to obedience to the holy Church of Rome, promising that in this obedience they would surely attain salvation — and then, once he had brought them under his laws, he commanded them to doubt their salvation. So the kingdom of Antichrist first boasts loudly of the holiness of its orders, rules, and laws, and confidently promises eternal life to those who observe them. But after these miserable

people have long punished their bodies with sleepless vigils, fasting, and other practices according to human traditions and rules, the only thing they gain is uncertainty about whether their obedience even pleases God. In this way Satan carried on his most horrible destruction of souls through the Pope — which is why the papacy is a slaughterhouse of consciences and the very kingdom of the devil.

To defend and prop up this destructive error, they cited the saying of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 9: 'The righteous and the wise are in God's hand; yet no one knows whether it is love or hatred that awaits them.' Some interpret this as referring to future hatred, some to present hatred — but neither group understands Solomon, who in that passage means nothing of the sort they imagine. In fact, the whole of Scripture teaches us above all things not to doubt, but to be sure and to believe without wavering that God is merciful, loving, and patient — that He is neither evasive nor deceptive, but faithful and true, keeping His promises. Indeed He has fulfilled them, by giving His only begotten Son to death for our sins, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. Given this, we cannot doubt that God is pleased with us and that He truly loves us — that the hatred and wrath of God have been removed, since He gave His Son to die for us wretched sinners. Although this truth is laid out and repeated throughout the entire Gospel, it accomplished nothing for them. This one passage from Solomon, misunderstood, carried more weight — especially among the monks and strict religious hypocrites — than all the promises and consolations of the entire Scripture, indeed more

than Christ Himself. They abused the Scriptures to their own destruction, and were justly punished for despising the Scriptures and rejecting the Gospel.

We need to know these things for two reasons. First, because the papists boast of their holiness as though they had never done any wrong. They must therefore be confronted with their own abominations, which have filled the whole world — as their own published writings in great number testify. Second, so that we may be fully certain that we hold the pure doctrine of the Gospel — a certainty the Pope cannot claim. In his kingdom, even if everything else were sound and pure, this monstrous teaching of doubting God's grace and favor would outstrip every other error. And even though it is obvious that the enemies of Christ's Gospel teach uncertain things — since they command people's consciences to remain in doubt — they still condemn and kill us as heretics for disagreeing with them and teaching things that are certain. And they do so with such diabolical rage and cruelty, as though they were the most thoroughly convinced of all.

Let us therefore thank God that we are delivered from this monstrous teaching of doubt, and that we can now assure ourselves that the Holy Spirit cries and produces in our hearts groanings too deep for words. This is our anchor and our foundation. The Gospel commands us to look not at our own good works or our own perfection, but at God who makes the promise and at Christ the Mediator. The Pope, by contrast, commands us to look not at God the promiser or at Christ our High Priest, but at our own works and merits. From the one path must follow doubt and despair. From the other follows assurance of God's favor and joy of the Spirit. We hold fast to God, who cannot lie. He says: 'See, I give

My Son to death, so that through His blood He may redeem you from your sins and from eternal death.' I cannot doubt this without flatly denying God. This is why our teaching is so certain — it takes us out of ourselves and away from looking at ourselves, so that we do not lean on our own strength, our own conscience, our own feelings, our own person, or our own works, but on what is outside of us: the promise and faithfulness of God, which cannot deceive us. The Pope does not know this, and so he foolishly imagines that no one — however righteous or wise — can know whether he is loved or hated by God. But if a person truly is righteous and wise, he knows with assurance that he is loved by God — otherwise he is neither righteous nor wise.

Furthermore, Solomon's statement says nothing at all about God's hatred or favor toward people. It is a moral observation about human ingratitude. The world is so perverse and ungrateful that the more a person deserves, the less thanks he will receive — and often those who should have been his closest friends become his worst enemies. And those who deserve the least will be most highly regarded. David, a holy man and a good king, was driven from his kingdom. The prophets, Christ, and His apostles were killed. The history of every nation shows that many people who served their country well were banished by their own citizens and lived in great misery, and some died shamefully in prison. Solomon is therefore speaking in this passage not about the conscience's relationship to God, or about God's favor and judgment, but about people's judgments and attitudes toward one another. He is saying, in effect: there are many righteous and wise men through whom God brings great good and gives peace to others. But people are so far from recognizing this that they often re-

spond to such men's faithful service with hostility. Therefore, no matter how well a person does his work, he cannot know whether his diligence and faithfulness will earn him the hatred or the approval of other people.

This is exactly our experience today. When we preached the Gospel of peace, life, and eternal salvation to our fellow Germans, we expected to be welcomed — but instead of favor we received bitter and intense hatred. In the beginning, many were greatly moved by our teaching and received it gladly. We assumed they would become our friends and brothers, and that together we would spread this teaching to others. But instead we have found that they are false brothers and deadly enemies who sow and spread errors and false teaching, and who twist and undermine what we teach rightly and faithfully, stirring up trouble in the churches. Whoever faithfully fulfills his duty in whatever position he holds, and receives nothing but ingratitude and hatred in return, should not torment himself over it. Let him say with Christ: 'They hated Me without cause.' And also: 'In return for my love they opposed me, but I prayed.'

By commanding people to doubt God's favor, the Pope removed God and all His promises from the church, buried all of Christ's benefits, and abolished the entire Gospel. These consequences follow necessarily: when people lean on their own works and merits instead of God's promises, they cannot be assured of His goodwill and must inevitably doubt — and at last despair. No one can understand what God's will is or what pleases Him apart from His word. His word assures us that God set aside all the anger and displeasure He had toward us when He gave His only Son for our sins. Let us therefore completely abandon this diaboli-

cal doubting — by which the entire papacy was poisoned — and be fully assured that God is merciful to us, that we please Him, that He cares for us, and that we have the Holy Spirit interceding for us with crying and groaning that cannot be expressed.

True crying and groaning occurs when a person in temptation calls upon God — not as a tyrant, not as an angry judge, not as a torturer, but as a Father — even if that groaning is so soft and hidden that it can barely be detected. In serious temptation, when conscience wrestles with the judgment of God, it tends to call God not a Father but an unjust, angry, and cruel tyrant. This cry — which Satan stirs up in the heart — far overpowers the Spirit's cry and is felt with great force. It seems as though God has abandoned us and will throw us into hell. So believers often cry out in the Psalms: 'I am cut off from before Your eyes.' And: 'I have become like a broken vessel.' This is not the groaning that cries 'Abba Father.' It is the roar of God's wrath, crying: 'O cruel judge! O cruel tormentor!' At that moment it is time to turn your eyes away from the law, from works, and from the feeling of your own conscience, and to take hold by faith of the promise — that is, of the word of grace and life. This word raises the conscience back up, so that it begins to groan and say: 'Though the law accuse me and sin and death terrify me, yet O my God, You have promised grace, righteousness, and eternal life through Jesus Christ.' And so the promise brings forth a sighing and groaning that cries 'Abba Father.'

Verse 7. Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son.

This is the conclusion of everything he has said before. It is as if he said: Since we have received the Spirit through the Gospel, by whom we cry 'Abba Father,' then this verdict has been pronounced in heaven: there is no more bondage, but only freedom and adop-

tion. And what brings this freedom? This very groaning. How? The Father offers me through His promise His grace and fatherly favor. All that remains is for me to receive this grace. And this happens when I cry out in return with this groaning, and with a childlike heart respond to the name 'Father.' In that moment Father and Son meet, and the union is made without any formality or ceremony — nothing stands between them. No law is required here, no work. For what can a person do in the midst of terror and the deep darkness of temptation? There is nothing here but the Father promising and calling me His son through Christ, who was made under the law — and I receiving this and answering with a groan: 'Father.' Nothing is demanded, nothing required — only that childlike groaning that takes hold of a sure hope and trust in the midst of trouble, and says: 'You promise and call me Your child for Christ's sake, and I in turn receive this and call You Father.' This truly is what it means to become a child — simply, without any works. But these things cannot be understood without experience and practice.

Paul uses the word 'servant' here differently from how he used it in chapter 3, where he said: 'There is neither slave nor free.' Here he means one who is a servant of the law — that is, one who is subject to the law, as he said just above: 'We were in bondage under the elementary principles of the world.' To be a servant in Paul's sense here means to be guilty and imprisoned under the law, under the wrath of God and death — to see God not as a merciful Father but as a torturer, an enemy, and a tyrant. This is true bondage and captivity, being cruelly tormented in it. For the law does not deliver from sin and death — it reveals and increases sin and produces wrath. This bondage, Paul says, continues no longer.

It no longer oppresses us or weighs us down. Paul says: 'You are no longer a servant.' But the statement is even broader: in Christ there is no more bondage of any kind — only freedom and adoption. For when faith comes, that bondage ends, as he said in chapter 3.

Since the Spirit of Christ cries 'Abba Father' in our hearts and we are no longer servants but children, it follows that we are delivered not only from the horrible burdens of the Pope and all the abominations of human tradition, but also from all the jurisdiction and authority of God's law itself. We should therefore not allow the law to reign in our conscience — and still less should we allow the Pope with his empty threats and terrors. He roars mightily like a lion (Revelation 10) and threatens all who do not obey his laws with the wrath and indignation of almighty God and his blessed apostles. But Paul arms and comforts us against these roarings when he says: 'You are no longer a servant but a son.' Take hold of this comfort by faith and say: 'O law, your tyranny has no place in the throne where Christ my Lord sits. I will not hear you there — and still less will I hear you, O Antichrist, with your threats — for I am free and a son, not subject to any bondage or servile law.' Let Moses with his law — and still less the Pope — enter the bridal chamber where Christ alone must rule: that is, let neither of them reign in the conscience, which Christ has delivered from the law so that it should not be subject to any bondage. Let the servants stay in the valley with the donkey. Let only Isaac go up the mountain with his father Abraham. In other words, let the law have dominion over the body and the old man: let him be under the law, bear its burden, be exercised and tested by it, and let the law prescribe what he must do, suffer, and how he should live and conduct him-

self among people. But let it not defile the bed where Christ alone should rest — that is, let it not trouble the conscience. The conscience alone ought to live with Christ, her husband, in the kingdom of freedom and adoption.

Since you cry 'Abba Father' by the Spirit of Christ, Paul says, you are no longer servants but free people and sons. Therefore you are free from the law, free from sin, free from death — saved, and now completely delivered from every evil. Adoption therefore brings with it the eternal kingdom and the entire heavenly inheritance. How immeasurable the glory of this gift is no human heart can fully grasp, let alone express. For now we see this only dimly, as if from far away. We have only this faint groaning and weak faith, resting on nothing but the sound of Christ's voice promising. We must not measure this by reason or by what we feel, but by God's promise. Because God is infinite, His promise is also infinite — even though it seems at present to be hemmed in on all sides by anguish and narrowness. Therefore nothing can now accuse, terrify, or bind the conscience any further. There is no more servitude, only adoption — which brings not only freedom from the law, sin, and death, but also the inheritance of eternal life, as Paul goes on to say.

Verse 7. And if a son, then an heir through God.

Whoever is a son must also be an heir, for birth itself makes him worthy of the inheritance. No work or merit brings him the inheritance — only his birth does. In receiving the inheritance he is entirely passive, not active: he does not earn it, labor for it, or strive for it — being born is what makes him an heir. In the same way, we receive eternal gifts — the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, the glory of the resurrection, and eternal life — not by acting

but by receiving, not by doing but by being given to. Nothing else comes between. Faith alone lays hold of the promise offered. Just as a son in a household becomes an heir by birth alone, so here faith alone makes us children of God — born of the word, which is the womb of God, in which we are conceived, carried, born, and nourished. Through this new birth we become new creatures, formed by faith in the word. We become Christians, children and heirs of God through Jesus Christ. Being heirs, we are delivered from death, sin, and the devil, and we possess righteousness and eternal life.

What surpasses all human understanding is that Paul calls us heirs — not of some powerful prince, not of an emperor, not of the world, but of God, the almighty Creator of all things. This inheritance of ours is, as Paul says elsewhere, beyond all measure of value. If a person could truly grasp how great it is to be the son and heir of God and believe it with steady faith, he would regard all the power and riches of every kingdom in the world as worthless garbage compared to his eternal inheritance. He would despise whatever is considered high and glorious in this world. In fact, the greater the world's pomp and splendor, the more he would loathe it. Whatever the world most prizes and celebrates would appear to him most vile and worthless. For what is the entire world — with all its power, riches, and glory — compared to God, whose son and heir he is? Beyond that, he would long with Paul to depart and be with Christ. Nothing would be more welcome to him than a swift death, which he would embrace like a joyful peace — knowing it would be the end of all his miseries and the doorway into his in-

heritance. Indeed, a person who could believe this fully would not long remain alive — he would be immediately overwhelmed with an excess of joy.

But the law of the flesh warring against the law of the mind hinders faith in us and does not allow it to be complete. This is why we need the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit, who in our troubles and afflictions intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, as I have already described. Sin still remains in the flesh, and it frequently oppresses the conscience and so weakens faith that we cannot look with joy and desire on the eternal riches God has given us through Christ. Paul himself, feeling this battle of the flesh against the spirit, cries out: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?' He condemns his body — which he was obligated to love — by calling it by that harsh name, 'this body of death.' He means: my body afflicts me and torments me more than death itself, for it blocked even his joy in the Spirit. He did not always have sweet and joyful thoughts about the heavenly inheritance to come — he too often felt great heaviness of spirit, anguish, and terror.

This shows how hard a thing faith is — not something easily and quickly grasped, as certain satisfied and smug spirits imagine who think they can swallow the entire Scripture at once. The great weakness that remains in believers, and the constant struggle of the flesh against the spirit, shows how feeble faith still is in them. For a perfect faith would bring immediate and complete contempt for this present life. If we could fully assure ourselves and steadily believe that God is our Father and we are His sons and heirs, we would utterly despise this world — with all its glory, righteousness, wisdom, power, royal thrones and crowns, riches and pleasures.

We would not be so anxious about this life. We would not cling to worldly things, trusting them when we have them and despairing when we lose them. We would do everything with great love, humility, and patience. But we do the opposite — because the flesh is still strong, faith is still feeble, and the spirit still weak. Paul says rightly, therefore, that in this life we have only the firstfruits of the Spirit, and that in the world to come we shall have the full harvest.

Verse 7. Through God.

Paul always has Christ on his lips — he cannot forget Him. He foresaw clearly that nothing would be less known in the world — even among those who call themselves Christians — than Christ and His Gospel. Therefore he constantly talks about Christ and keeps Him before our eyes. Whenever he speaks of grace, righteousness, the promise, adoption, and inheritance, he always adds the phrase 'in Christ' or 'through Christ' — subtly striking against the law. As if to say: these things come to us not through the law or the works of the law, and still less through our own strength or the works of human tradition — but only through Christ.

Verses 8-9. But at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

This is the conclusion of Paul's argument. From this point to the end of the letter, he does not dispute much but gives practical instructions about conduct. But first he rebukes the Galatians, deeply grieved that this divine and heavenly teaching was so quickly and easily driven out of their hearts. It is as if he said: You

have teachers who want to drag you back into the bondage of the law. I did not do this. My teaching called you out of darkness and ignorance of God into a wonderful light and knowledge of Him. I brought you out of bondage and set you in the freedom of the sons of God — not by preaching the works of the law or human merit, but by preaching the grace and righteousness of God, and the gift of heavenly and eternal blessings through Christ. Since all this is true — why do you so quickly abandon the light and return to darkness? Why do you allow yourselves to be so easily led from grace back to the law, from freedom back to bondage?

Here we see again, as I noted before, how easy it is to fall in faith — as the example of the Galatians makes plain. The Anabaptists, Libertines, and similar heretics of our own day show the same thing. We for our part proclaim the teaching of faith with constant labor — through preaching, reading, and writing — and we clearly distinguish the Gospel from the law. Yet we make little headway. This comes from the devil, who works by every subtle means to deceive people and hold them in error. He cannot stand the true knowledge of grace and faith in Christ. So, in order to remove Christ from sight entirely, he sets up other attractions that slowly draw people away from faith and from the knowledge of grace toward disputes about the law. Once he has accomplished this, Christ has been taken away. It is not without reason, therefore, that Paul speaks of Christ so much and so often, and works so diligently to set forth the teaching of faith — attributing righteousness to faith alone, taking it away from the law, and declaring that the law produces the exact opposite: wrath and increased sin. Paul's deep desire is that we would not allow Christ to be torn from our hearts — that the bride would not let her husband leave her

arms, but would always embrace Him and cling to Him. For where He is present, there is no danger: there is the faithful groaning, the Father's goodwill, adoption, and inheritance.

But why does Paul say the Galatians turned back to weak and worthless elementary principles — that is, to the law — when they had never had the law, since they were Gentiles? Or why does he not simply say: 'Once you did not know God and served false gods — now that you know God, why are you turning back to idol worship?' Does Paul treat falling from the promise to the law — from faith to works — as the same thing as serving gods who are no gods by nature? My answer is this: whoever falls from the article of justification does not know God and is an idolater. It therefore makes no difference whether he turns afterward to the law or to the worship of idols. Whether he is called a monk, a Turk, a Jew, or an Anabaptist — it is all the same. For once this article is lost, nothing remains but error, hypocrisy, wickedness, and idolatry — no matter how much it may appear on the outside to be truth, true worship of God, and genuine holiness.

The reason is that God cannot be known in any other way than through Christ, as it is written (John 1:18): 'The only begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.' Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, in whom God has established all His promises. Therefore Christ is the only means — you might say the lens — through which we see God and come to know His will. In Christ we see that God is not a harsh taskmaster or an angry judge, but a most gracious, loving, and merciful Father, who — in order to bless us, that is, to deliver us from the law, sin, death, and every evil, and to give us grace, righteousness, and eternal life — did not

spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all. This is true knowledge of God — a conviction from God that does not mislead us but shows us God as He truly is.

Whoever falls from this knowledge will inevitably form this fantasy in his heart: 'I will set up this form of worship. I will join this religious order. I will choose this or that work, and by it I will serve God. And I have no doubt that God will accept it and reward me with eternal life.' 'For He is merciful and generous, giving good things even to the unworthy and ungrateful — how much more will He give me grace and eternal life in return for my many great deeds and merits?' This is the highest wisdom, righteousness, and religion that human reason can conceive of — and it is common to all nations: papists, Jews, Turks, heretics, and all the rest. They cannot rise higher than the Pharisee in the Gospel. They have no knowledge of Christian righteousness or of the righteousness of faith. For the natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. And as Scripture says: 'There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God.' Therefore there is no real difference between a papist, a Jew, a Turk, and a heretic. There are differences of persons, places, rituals, religions, works, and ceremonies — but at the core, the reasoning, the heart, the opinion, and the thinking are all the same. The Turk thinks exactly what the Carthusian monk thinks: if I do this work, God will be merciful to me; if I do not, He will be angry. There is no middle ground between human works-righteousness and the knowledge of Christ. When this knowledge is lost or obscured, it makes no difference whether you are a monk, a Turk, or a Jew.

It is therefore pure foolishness when the papists and Turks quarrel with each other over religion and worship, each insisting they have the true religion and the true service of God. The monks themselves cannot even agree among themselves, each claiming to be holier than another on the basis of trivial external ceremonies — yet in their hearts their thinking is so identical that one egg is no more like another. They all imagine the same thing: if I do this work, God will have mercy on me; if I do not, He will be angry. Therefore every person who turns away from the knowledge of Christ must inevitably fall into idolatry and form an idea of God that does not match who God truly is. The Carthusian monk, by observing his rule, and the Turk, by keeping his Quran, both confidently believe they are pleasing God and will receive a reward from Him for their effort.

A god who forgives sins and justifies sinners in this way is nowhere to be found — this is nothing but an empty fantasy, a dream, and an idol of the heart. God has not promised to save and justify people for the religions, observances, ceremonies, and rules that people devise for themselves. In fact, as all of Scripture testifies, God hates nothing more than such self-chosen acts of devotion, such invented rituals and ceremonies — and for them He has overthrown whole kingdoms and empires. Therefore, all who trust in their own strength and righteousness do worship a god — but a god they themselves have invented, not the true God. The true God speaks this way: 'No righteousness, wisdom, or religion pleases Me except the one by which the Father is glorified through the Son. Whoever takes hold of this Son — and Me, and My promise in Him

— by faith, to him I am God, to him I am Father. Him I accept, justify, and save.' 'All others remain under wrath, because they worship what by nature is not God.'

Whoever abandons this teaching must fall into ignorance of God. He does not understand what true Christian righteousness, wisdom, or worship of God is. He is an idolater remaining under the law, sin, death, and the power of the devil — and everything he does is condemned. Take the Anabaptist, who imagines he pleases God by being rebaptized, by abandoning his house, wife, and children, by mortifying his flesh, enduring hardships, and ultimately death itself. Yet there is not a single drop of the knowledge of Christ in him. He sets Christ aside entirely and dreams only of his own works — his renouncing of possessions, his suffering, his mortification. In his heart and spirit he is no different from a Turk, a Jew, or a papist. The only difference is in the outward appearance, works, and ceremonies he has chosen for himself. The same trust in works marks all the monks and other religious orders — though they differ from each other in their dress and external customs.

There are today many people like this who consider themselves genuine professors and teachers of the Gospel, and who say in so many words that people are delivered from their sins by Christ's death. But because they teach faith in a way that places more weight on love than on faith, they greatly dishonor Christ and wickedly distort His word. They imagine that God regards and accepts us on account of our love — the love by which, having been reconciled to God, we love God and our neighbor. If that were true, we would have no need of Christ at all. Such people are not serving the true God but an idol of their own heart that they themselves

have fashioned. For the true God does not regard or accept us on account of our love, virtue, or reformed life — but on account of Christ.

They object: But Scripture commands us to love God with all our heart! That is true. But it does not follow that we actually do so just because God commands it. If we did love God with all our heart, then no doubt we would be justified and live through that obedience, as it is written: 'He who does these things shall live by them.' But the Gospel says: you do not do these things — and therefore you will not live by them. For the command 'You shall love the Lord your God' requires perfect obedience, perfect fear, perfect trust, and perfect love toward God. These are things people neither do nor can accomplish in their corrupt nature. Therefore the law 'You shall love the Lord your God' does not justify — it accuses and condemns everyone, as the Scripture says: 'The law produces wrath.' Christ, on the other hand, is the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. We have already covered this at length.

Similarly, a Jew who keeps the law with the belief that his obedience will please God is not serving the true God — he is an idolater, worshiping a dream and an idol of his own heart that does not exist. For the God of his fathers — the God he claims to worship — promised Abraham a Seed through whom all nations would be blessed. God is therefore known, and the blessing is given, not through the law but through the Gospel of Christ. Although Paul speaks these words — 'when you did not know God, you served' — directly and primarily to the Galatians, who were Gentiles, his words also reach the Jews, who, though they had outwardly rejected their idols, in their hearts worshiped them more than the

Gentiles did, as it says in Romans 2: 'You who abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege?' The Gentiles were not God's people, they had not His word, and so their idolatry was open and obvious. But the idolatrous Jews concealed their idolatry behind the name and word of God — as all those do who seek righteousness through works — and by this outward show of holiness they deceived many. Therefore, the more holy and spiritual an idolatry appears, the more dangerous it is.

But how can these two apparently contradictory statements of the apostle be reconciled: 'You did not know God' and 'you worshiped'? My answer: All people by nature have this general knowledge — that there is a God. As Paul says in Romans 1: 'What may be known of God is plain to them, for God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes have been clearly perceived in the creation of the world.' Furthermore, the religious ceremonies and rituals that have existed among all nations throughout history sufficiently show that all people have had some general awareness of God. Whether this came by nature or by tradition passed down from their ancestors, I will not argue here.

Someone will object: if all people knew God, why does Paul say the Galatians did not know God before the Gospel was preached to them? My answer: there are two kinds of knowledge of God — general and particular. All people have the general knowledge: that there is a God, that He created heaven and earth, that He is just, that He punishes the wicked. But what God thinks of us, what His will toward us is, what He will give and do to deliver us from sin and death and bring us to salvation — this true knowledge of God — they do not have. It is as if I know someone by sight but do not truly know him, because I do not know what he thinks of me.

People know naturally that God exists, but they do not know what His will is or is not. Scripture says: 'There is none who understands God.' And elsewhere: 'No one has ever seen God' — meaning, no one has known what God's will is. And what good does it do you to know that God exists while remaining ignorant of what His will is toward you? People imagine many different answers to that question. The Jew imagines it is God's will that he worship according to Moses' law. The Turk, if he follows the Quran. The monk, if he keeps his rule and fulfills his vows. But all of these are deceived and have become futile in their thinking, as Paul says in Romans 1:22 — not knowing what pleases or displeases God, and therefore worshiping not the true and living God but the dreams and fantasies of their own hearts.

This is what Paul means when he says: 'When you did not know God' — that is, when you did not know God's will — 'you served those which by nature are no gods' — that is, you served the dreams and fantasies of your own heart, imagining apart from God's word that He was to be worshiped through this or that work, this or that rite or ceremony. All idolatry grew from this starting point: the natural knowledge that God exists. Without at least that much awareness of the divine, idolatry could never have entered the world. But because people had this natural knowledge of God, they went on to form vain and corrupt ideas about Him, apart from and against His word — ideas they held and defended as certain truth, dreaming of a god who is nothing like the God who actually exists. The monk imagines a god who forgives sins, gives grace, and awards eternal life in exchange for keeping his rule. That god exists nowhere. So the monk does not serve the true God but what is by nature no god — namely, the idol and fantasy of his

own heart, the false opinion of God that he mistakes for certain truth. Reason itself forces us to admit that a person's opinion of God is not God. Therefore, whoever worships God without His word does not serve the true God — but, as Paul says, what is by nature no god.

Whether you take 'elementary principles' here to mean the law of Moses or the traditions of the Gentiles — though Paul speaks primarily and directly of Moses' law — the difference is small. For falling from grace to the law is no less dangerous than falling from grace to outright idolatry. Without Christ, there is nothing but pure idolatry — a false and imaginary god — whether the system is called Moses' law, the Pope's decrees, or the Turks' Quran. And so Paul adds these next words with a kind of astonishment:

Verse 9. But now that you have come to know God —

It is as if he said: It is astonishing that you, who have come to know God through the preaching of faith — and whom I thought were so firmly grounded that I never imagined you could be so easily overthrown — have now, under pressure from the false apostles, turned back to the weak and worthless ceremonies, which you wish to serve all over again. You heard from my preaching what God's will is: to bless all nations — not through circumcision or keeping the law, but through Christ, who was promised to Abraham. Those who believe in Him are blessed together with Abraham, who believed. They are sons and heirs of God. This is how you came to know God (Galatians 3:9; Galatians 4:7).

Verse 9. Or rather are known by God —

Paul corrects what he just said — 'But now that you have come to know God' — and turns it around: 'Or rather are known by God.' He does this because he feared they had lost God entirely. It is as if he said: Have you come to this — that you now no longer know God, but are turning from grace back to the law? Yet even so, God still knows you. Our knowledge of God is more passive than active — meaning, it consists more in our being known by God than in our knowing Him. All our efforts to know and find God amount to this: allowing God to work in us. He gives the word. When we receive that word through faith given from above, we are born again and become children of God. So the meaning is: 'You are known by God' — that is, you have been visited with the word, given faith and the Holy Spirit, and renewed by them. With these words — 'you are known by God' — Paul takes away all righteousness from the law and denies that we come to know God through the merit of our own works. For no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him (Matthew 11:27). And: 'By His knowledge shall My Servant justify many, because He shall bear their iniquities' (Isaiah 53:11). Our knowledge of God, therefore, consists in receiving, not in doing.

Paul is astonished that after truly knowing God through the Gospel, the Galatians could turn back so quickly to weak and worthless elementary principles under the influence of the false apostles. I myself would be deeply astonished if our congregation — which by God's grace has been godly reformed in pure teaching and faith — were seduced and overturned by some unstable and reckless person through one or two sermons, to the point where they no longer recognized me as their pastor. And yet that will indeed happen someday — if not while we are alive, then when we

are dead. For many will rise up who will present themselves as teachers and authorities, and under the guise of true religion will teach false and perverse doctrine, quickly pulling down in a short time what we have built with so much labor over so many years. We are no better than the apostles, who — to their deep grief and sorrow — saw with their own eyes the collapse of churches they themselves had planted. It is therefore no great surprise if we are forced to watch the same today in those churches where sectarians reign — who will one day, when we are gone, take possession of the churches we have labored to establish through our ministry, and infect and destroy them with their poison. Yet Christ will remain and reign to the end of the world, and He will do so in remarkable ways — just as He did even under the papacy.

Paul seems to speak very disparagingly of the law when he calls it 'elementary principles' — as he did at the beginning of this chapter — and not just elementary principles, but weak and worthless elementary principles and ceremonies. Is it not blasphemy to apply such offensive terms to the law of God? The law, used rightly, is meant to serve the promises and stand alongside them and grace. But when the law fights against the promises, it is no longer the holy law of God — it has become a false and diabolical teaching that drives people to despair and must be rejected.

When Paul calls the law weak and worthless elementary principles, he is speaking of the law in relation to proud and presumptuous hypocrites who seek to be justified by it — not speaking of the law in its true spiritual use, which produces wrath. For the law in its proper use accuses and condemns people — and in that sense it is not weak or worthless at all, but mighty and rich. It is an invincible power. Compared to the law in this sense, the conscience is

what is weak and worthless. The conscience is so tender that even a small sin can so trouble and terrify it that it despairs entirely, unless something raises it up again. Therefore the law in its proper use has more strength and authority than heaven and earth can contain — a single letter or stroke of the law is capable of condemning all of humanity, as the account of the law given through Moses at Sinai demonstrates (Exodus 19-20). That is the true and divine use of the law, which is not what Paul is speaking about here.

Paul is speaking here about hypocrites — people who have never reached grace, or who have fallen away from it. These people abuse the law by seeking to be justified through it. They wear themselves out day and night with the works of the law, as Paul testifies about the Jews in Romans 10: 'I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness...' They hope to be strengthened and enriched by the law to such a degree that they can set the power and wealth they have gained through their own righteousness against the wrath and judgment of God — and so to appease God and be saved. In this sense we can rightly say the law is a weak and worthless elementary principle: it can give neither help nor answers.

And if someone wants to press the point further, he can say that the law is weak and worthless because it actually makes people weaker and poorer — and because the law has no power or riches of its own with which to give or produce righteousness. In fact, it is not merely weak and poor, but is weakness and poverty itself. How then could it possibly strengthen or enrich those who were already weak and poor? To seek justification through the law

is like a weak and sick man looking for some greater disease to cure his weakness and poverty — which would only bring about his complete destruction. It would be like someone with epilepsy seeking to cure it by adding the plague on top of it — or like a leper going to another leper, or a beggar to another beggar, each expecting the other to help and enrich him.

Paul shows that those who seek to be justified by the law gain one thing from it: they grow weaker and poorer every day. They are already weak and poor by nature — that is, they are children of wrath, subject to death and eternal condemnation — and yet they reach out and grasp what is nothing but weakness and poverty, hoping to be strengthened and enriched by it. Therefore everyone who turns from the promise to the law, from faith to works, does nothing but heap onto himself — already weak as he is — a burden he cannot carry (Acts 15). And in carrying it he becomes ten times weaker, until he finally falls into despair, unless Christ comes and delivers him.

The Gospel testifies to this in the account of the woman who had suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years, endured much from many physicians, had spent everything she had, and yet was not healed — in fact, the longer she was in their care, the worse she became. Those who do the works of the law in order to be justified by them are not only not made righteous — they are made twice as unrighteous as before, meaning twice as weak and poor, and less able than ever to do any genuine good. I have seen this proved true in myself and in many others. I knew many monks in the papacy who performed great and strenuous works with great zeal in pursuit of righteousness and salvation — yet they were more impatient, weaker, more miserable, more faithless, more fearful, and

more prone to despair than anyone else. Civil rulers who were constantly occupied with great and weighty matters of government were not as impatient, fearful, cowardly, superstitious, and faithless as these merit-seekers were.

Whoever seeks righteousness through the law — what can he imagine except that God is angry and must be appeased with works? Once he has formed this idea, he gets to work. But he can never do enough good works to quiet his conscience. He always wants more. He even finds sins in the works he has already done. So his conscience can never find peace but is always uncertain, always saying to itself: 'You have not made the right sacrifice. You have not prayed rightly. You left that undone. You committed this sin or that one.' His heart trembles and feels crushed under countless sins that keep multiplying without end, so that he drifts further and further from righteousness until he finally falls into despair. This is why many people at the point of death have spoken words of desperation: 'O wretch that I am — I have not kept my rule! Where can I flee from Christ, that angry judge? I wish to God I had been made a swineherd or the lowest person on earth.'

And so the monk at the end of his life is weaker, poorer, more faithless, and more fearful than he was at the very beginning when he first entered his order. The reason is that he tried to strengthen himself through weakness and enrich himself through poverty. The law, human tradition, or his monastic rule was supposed to heal him in his sickness and enrich him in his poverty — but it has left him more feeble and destitute than the tax collectors and prostitutes. Tax collectors and prostitutes do not have a pile of good works to trust in the way monks do — but even though they feel their sins acutely, they can still say with the tax collector: 'O Lord,

be merciful to me, a sinner.' The monk, by contrast, has spent his entire life in weak and worthless elementary principles, and has been stamped with this conviction: 'If you keep your rule, you will be saved.' With this false persuasion he is so thoroughly deceived and bewitched that he cannot grasp grace — he cannot even bring it to mind. And so, no matter how many or how great his works are, he always thinks he has not done enough, always looking to do more — piling up works in an attempt to appease God's wrath and justify himself, until he is driven to complete despair. Whoever turns from faith to follow the law is like the dog in Aesop's fable that drops the meat and snaps at the reflection. It is impossible for those who seek righteousness and salvation through the law — which is humanity's natural tendency — ever to find peace and rest of conscience. They do nothing but heap law upon law, tormenting themselves and others, and afflicting people's consciences so badly that many die before their time from sheer anguish. For one law always gives birth to ten more, and they multiply without number and without end.

Who would have thought that the Galatians, who had received such a sound and pure teaching from such an excellent apostle, could be led away from it so quickly and completely overturned by the false apostles? It is not without reason that I repeat this so often: falling away from the truth of the Gospel is easy. The reason is that people — even believers — do not sufficiently appreciate how excellent and precious the true knowledge of Christ is. So they do not work as diligently and carefully as they should to obtain it and hold on to it. Beyond that, most of those who hear the word are not being tested by any cross or affliction — they are not wrestling with sin, death, and the devil, but living in comfort and security without

any real struggle. Because they have not been tested and tried through temptation, and have not therefore armed themselves with God's word against the devil's schemes, they never truly feel the power and usefulness of the word. While they are around faithful ministers and preachers, they can repeat what they hear and say the right things, convincing themselves they fully understand the matter of justification. But when those ministers are gone and wolves in sheep's clothing take their place, the same thing happens to them as happened to the Galatians — they are suddenly deceived and easily turned back to weak and worthless elementary principles.

Paul has a distinctive way of speaking that the other apostles did not use. None of the other apostles called the law what Paul calls it here — a weak and worthless elementary principle, utterly useless for righteousness. Frankly, I would never have dared to use such language about the law and would have considered it serious blasphemy against God, had Paul not done so first. But I have already treated this more thoroughly above, showing when the law is weak and worthless and when it is most powerful and authoritative. Now, if the law of God is weak and useless for justification, the laws and decrees of the Pope are far weaker and more useless still. We therefore condemn the ordinances, laws, and decrees of the Pope with the same boldness and confidence that Paul uses against the law of God — they are not only weak and worthless elementary principles, utterly useless for righteousness, but also execrable, accursed, diabolical, and damnable — for they blaspheme grace, overturn the Gospel, abolish faith, and remove Christ.

Since the Pope requires his laws to be kept as necessary for salvation, he is nothing less than Antichrist and the representative of Satan. All who cling to him, endorse his abominations and blasphemies, or keep his laws in order to merit forgiveness of sins are servants of Antichrist and of the devil. This has been the doctrine of the papal church for a long time — that these laws must be kept as necessary for salvation. So the Pope sits in the temple of God, boasting that he is God. He opposes God and exalts himself above everything that is called God or worshiped. People's consciences feared and revered the Pope's laws and decrees more than the word of God and His ordinances. In this way the Pope made himself lord of heaven, earth, and hell, and wore the triple crown upon his head. His cardinals and bishops — his creatures — were made kings and princes of the world. And this is precisely why he had to burden people's consciences with his laws — if he had not, he could not long have maintained his fearsome power, his dignity, or his wealth. His entire kingdom would have collapsed quickly.

This point Paul is making here is weighty and important, and deserves careful attention: those who fall from grace to the law completely lose the knowledge of the truth. They cannot see their own sins. They know neither God nor the devil nor themselves. And they do not understand the true nature and use of the law — no matter how loudly they boast that they keep and observe it. For without the knowledge of grace — that is, without the Gospel of Christ — it is impossible for anyone to define the law correctly as a weak and worthless elementary principle, useless for righteousness. Instead, he judges the law in the opposite way: not only as necessary for salvation, but as something that strengthens the weak and enriches the poor — meaning that those who obey it will

be able to merit righteousness and eternal life. If this opinion stands, God's promise is denied, Christ is taken away, and lying, wickedness, and idolatry are established in their place. The Pope, along with all his bishops, schools, and entire institution, taught that his laws are necessary for salvation. He was therefore a teacher of weak and worthless elementary principles — and with these he made the church of Christ throughout the whole world weak and worthless, burdening and miserably tormenting it with his wicked laws, obscuring Christ and burying His Gospel.

Verse 9. To which you desire to be enslaved all over again.

Paul adds these words to make clear he is speaking of proud and presumptuous hypocrites who seek to be justified by the law, as I explained above. Elsewhere he calls the law holy and good. As he says in 1 Timothy 1: 'We know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully' — meaning, civilly to restrain evildoers, and spiritually to make sin increase. But whoever observes the law in order to gain righteousness before God turns the good law into something damnable and harmful for himself. Paul is therefore rebuking the Galatians because they wanted to be enslaved to the law again — the law that does not remove sin but increases it. For when a sinner — already weak and poor in himself — seeks to be justified by the law, he finds in the law nothing but weakness and poverty. So two sick and feeble beggars meet, and neither can help or heal the other. They can only trouble each other.

We who are strong in Christ are glad to serve the law — not the weak and worthless law, but the mighty and authoritative law — that is, insofar as it has power and authority over the body. In that case we serve the law only in our bodies and outward behavior, and not in our conscience. But the Pope requires that we obey his

laws with this conviction: if you do this or that, you are righteous; if you do not, you are damned. Here the law becomes far more than just a weak and worthless element. For as long as the conscience remains enslaved under the law in this way, nothing results but weakness and poverty. Therefore the whole weight of the issue rests on that one word: to serve. Paul's meaning is that he does not want the conscience to serve under the law as a captive — but to be free and to stand above the law. For the conscience is dead to the law through Christ, and the law is dead to the conscience — which we have treated more thoroughly above in chapter 2.

Verse 10. You observe days and months and seasons and years.

These words make clear what the false apostles were teaching — namely, the observance of days, months, seasons, and years. The Jews were commanded to keep the Sabbath, the new moons, the first and seventh months, the three appointed festivals (Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles), and the Year of Jubilee. The false apostles were compelling the Galatians to keep these same ceremonies as necessary for righteousness. Paul says, therefore, that by losing the grace and freedom they had in Christ, they had turned back to serving weak and worthless elementary principles. They had been convinced by the false apostles that these laws had to be kept, and that by keeping them they would obtain righteousness — and that if they did not keep them they would be condemned. Paul, by contrast, will not allow people's consciences to be bound by the law of Moses. He always delivers them from the law. 'Listen,' he writes a little later in chapter 5: 'I, Paul, tell you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you' (Galatians 5:2). And in Colossians 2:16:

'Let no one judge you in food or drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.' Our Savior Christ says the same: 'The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation' (Luke 17:20). How much less should people's consciences be burdened and trapped by human traditions.

Verse 11. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Here Paul reveals how deeply troubled he is by the Galatians' fall. He would rebuke them more harshly, but fears that if he presses too hard he will not only fail to help them but will push them further away and lose them entirely. So in his writing he softens his tone, and — as if the damage had fallen on himself — he says: 'I am afraid that I may have labored over you in vain.' He is saying: it grieves me that I preached the Gospel among you with such diligence and faithfulness, and see no fruit from it. Even so, while showing them real fatherly love and affection, he still manages to rebuke them — firmly, but in a concealed way. When he says he may have labored among them in vain — that is, preached without any fruit — he is indirectly showing that they are either stubborn unbelievers or have fallen away from the teaching of faith. Both unbelievers and those who have fallen from the faith are sinners, wicked, unrighteous, and condemned. Such people obey the law in vain. They observe days, months, and years — all in vain. In these words — 'I am afraid that I have labored over you in vain' — there is a kind of hidden excommunication. Paul means that the Galatians are cut off and separated from Christ unless they quickly return to sound and sincere teaching. Yet he does not pro-

nounce an open verdict against them. He could see that harsh dealings would accomplish nothing. So he changes his approach and speaks to them warmly:

Verse 12. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

Up to this point Paul has been entirely occupied with teaching, and being deeply stirred by the Galatians' serious and wicked defection, he dealt with them sharply — calling them fools, bewitched, people who do not believe the truth, crucifiers of Christ, and more. Now, with most of the letter completed, he begins to realize he may have been too severe with them. Concerned that his harshness might do more harm than good, he shows that his sharp reproof came from a genuinely fatherly and apostolic heart. He then softens his tone with warm and gentle words, hoping that if he has offended anyone — and no doubt he has offended many — he might win them back through kind and loving speech.

In doing this, he gives all pastors and ministers an example by his own conduct: they ought to bear a fatherly and motherly affection — not toward ravenous wolves, but toward poor sheep who have been led astray and are wandering. They must patiently bear with people's faults and weaknesses, gently instructing and restoring them with a spirit of meekness. There is simply no other way to bring them back. Overly sharp reproof and rebuke provokes anger or despair — not repentance. We should also note in passing that this is the nature and fruit of true and sound teaching: when it is properly taught and truly understood, it joins people's hearts together in remarkable unity. But when people reject sound and godly teaching and embrace error, that unity and harmony breaks down quickly. Therefore, whenever you see your brothers being seduced by vain and fanatical spirits and falling away from the arti-

cle of justification, you will find that those same people very soon begin to pursue the faithful with bitter hatred — toward the very people they previously loved most.

We see this in our own day among our false brothers and other sectarians. At the beginning of the Gospel's reform, they were glad to hear us and read our books with great zeal and enthusiasm. They recognized the grace of the Holy Spirit in us and honored us as ministers of God. Some of them lived alongside us for a time and conducted themselves very modestly and quietly. But when they left and were corrupted by the false teaching of the sectarians, they became more bitter enemies of our teaching and our name than anyone else. I often wonder deeply why they have developed such deadly hatred toward those they once loved so warmly and tenderly — for we gave them no offense and no cause to hate us. They themselves are forced to admit that we desire nothing more than the glory of God to be advanced, the grace of Christ truly understood, and the truth of the Gospel purely taught — which God has again in these latter days revealed through us to this ungrateful world. This should have moved them to love us, not hate us. I am therefore genuinely puzzled by this change. There is truly no other explanation: they have acquired new masters and listened to new teachers, whose poison has so infected them that former friends have become deadly enemies. And I see this as the common lot of the apostles and all faithful ministers — that their own disciples and hearers, once infected with the errors of false apostles and heretics, turn against them and become their enemies. Very few of the Galatians remained in the sound teaching of the apostle. All the rest, having been seduced by the false apostles, no longer recognized Paul as their pastor and teacher — indeed, noth-

ing was more repugnant to them than Paul's name and doctrine. And I fear that this letter brought very few of them back from their error.

If the same thing happened to us — if in our absence our congregation were seduced by some unstable enthusiast, and we wrote not one or two but many letters — we would accomplish very little. Our people, with only a few of the stronger ones excepted, would treat us no differently from how those seduced by the sectarians treat us today. They would sooner submit to the Pope than heed our warnings or approve our teaching. Nothing will persuade them that in rejecting Christ they are turning back to weak and worthless elementary principles and to what by nature is no god. The last thing they want to hear is that the teachers who have led them astray are destroyers of the Gospel of Christ and troublers of people's consciences. 'The Lutherans,' they say, 'are not the only wise ones — they are not the only ones who preach Christ or have the Holy Spirit, the gift of prophecy, and the true understanding of Scripture. Our teachers are no inferior to them — in fact they surpass them in many ways, because they follow the Spirit and teach spiritual things. The Lutherans, by contrast, have never tasted what true theology means. They are stuck in the letter, and so they teach nothing but the Catechism, faith, and love.' Therefore, as I often say, falling in faith is easy — and it is most dangerous: it is a fall from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell. This is not the kind of fall that belongs naturally to human weakness, like murder or adultery. It is diabolical — the devil's own work. Those who fall this way are rarely recovered. Most continue in their error, stubborn and unrepentant. And the last state of such people is

worse than the first, as our Savior Christ says: when the unclean spirit returns to his house, he does not come alone but brings seven other spirits worse than himself, and they dwell there.

Paul, perceiving through the Holy Spirit's revelation that there was real danger — that the Galatians, whom out of godly zeal he had called fools and bewitched, might be further inflamed against him rather than corrected by his sharp words — was caught in a difficult position. He knew the false apostles were now among the Galatians and would take his sharp reproof, which had come from fatherly love, and twist it against him. They would say: 'Now you can see what this Paul you admire so much is really like, and what spirit drives him. When he was with you he played the father, but his letters reveal that in his absence he is a tyrant.' Paul was therefore so troubled by his godly care and fatherly love that he could hardly decide what or how to write to them. It is a difficult thing to defend your cause with people who are absent, who have begun to hate you, and who have been persuaded by others that your cause is wrong. In this state of deep uncertainty he says shortly after: 'I am perplexed about you' — meaning: I do not know what to do or how to deal with you (Galatians 4:20).

Verse 12. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

These words are not about doctrine but about disposition. The meaning is not: 'Think about doctrine as I do.' It is: 'Have toward me the same disposition that I have toward you.' It is as if he said: 'Perhaps I have rebuked you too harshly — forgive this sharpness and do not judge my heart by my words, but judge my words by the feeling of my heart.' 'My words may sound rough and my correction harsh, but my heart is loving and fatherly.' 'Therefore, O

my Galatians, receive this rebuke in the same spirit in which I speak it — for the situation demanded that I be so firm and severe with you.'

We can say the same of ourselves. Our correction is firm, and our manner of writing sharp and forceful — but there is no bitterness in our hearts, no envy, no desire for revenge against our opponents. There is only godly concern and grief of spirit. We do not hate the Pope and other misguided teachers to the point of wishing them harm or desiring their destruction — on the contrary, we desire that they would return to the right path and be saved alongside us. A teacher disciplines his student not to harm him, but to reform him. The rod is sharp, but correction is necessary for the child, and the heart of the one who corrects is loving and kind. A father disciplines his son not to destroy him but to reform and improve him. The blows are painful to the child, but the father's heart is loving. And if he did not love his child, he would not discipline him at all — he would abandon him, give up on him, and let him ruin himself. Therefore the discipline a father gives his child is a sign of fatherly love, and it is profitable for the child (Hebrews 12:11). 'Think the same way about how I have dealt with you, O my Galatians — then you will not judge my correction as harsh and bitter, but as beneficial.' 'Discipline does not feel joyful for the moment but grievous — yet afterward it produces the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who are trained by it.' Have the same disposition toward me that I have toward you. I hold a loving heart toward you. I ask the same in return.

So he speaks to them kindly, and continues in this kind tone, in hopes of calming hearts that his sharp reproof had stirred up against him. He does not, however, take back his severe words. He

admits they were sharp and hard — but he says: necessity compelled me to rebuke you as firmly and severely as I did, and what I did came from a sincere and loving heart. A doctor gives his patient a bitter medicine not to hurt him, but to cure him. If the bitterness of the medicine given to a sick body should not be blamed on the doctor but on the medicine and the disease, then judge my severe and sharp reproof in the same way.

Verse 12. Brothers, I urge you. You have done me no wrong.

Is this really an appeal to the Galatians — calling them bewitched, disobedient to the truth, and crucifiers of Christ? It seems more like a severe rebuke. But Paul insists that it is not a rebuke but an earnest appeal — and indeed it is. It is as if he said: I admit I have spoken to you quite harshly, but take it in a good spirit — and then you will find that this rebuke of mine is not really a rebuke at all, but a pleading and an appeal. If a father corrects his son firmly, it is as much as saying: 'My son, please be a good child.' It looks like discipline, but if you look at the father's heart, it is a tender and earnest plea.

Verse 12. You have done me no wrong.

It is as if he said: Why would I be angry with you, or speak harshly out of any ill will, when you have not wronged me? The Galatians might object: 'Why then do you say we have gone astray, that we have abandoned your teaching, that we are foolish and bewitched? These things suggest that we have offended you.' He answers: You have not offended me — you have offended yourselves. And that is why I am so troubled — not for my own sake, but out of

love for you. Do not think therefore that my reproof came from malice or any ill feeling. I call God as my witness: you have done me no wrong. On the contrary, you have shown me great kindness.

By speaking to them this way, he prepares their hearts to receive his fatherly correction with a childlike spirit. This is how to soften a bitter medicine — mix it with honey and sugar to make it palatable. Parents do the same when they have firmly disciplined their children: they follow it with kind words and gifts — an apple, a pear, something sweet — so the children know that their parents love them and want what is good for them, however sharp the correction may have felt.

Verses 13-14. You know that it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the Gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

Paul now describes what kindnesses the Galatians had shown him. The first and greatest of these, he says, was this: when he first came among them to preach the Gospel, in weakness and under great trials, his difficult situation did not put them off at all. They showed themselves so loving, warm, and generous that not only were they not offended by his weakness, his trials, and the dangers that nearly overwhelmed him — they loved him deeply and received him as an angel of God, indeed as Jesus Christ Himself. This is a remarkable commendation of the Galatians — that they received the Gospel from someone as despised and hard-pressed on every side as Paul was. Wherever he preached the Gospel, Jews and Gentiles both murmured and raged against him. All the powerful, wise, religious, and educated people hated, persecuted, and slandered him. Yet none of this put the Galatians off in the least.

They looked past his weakness, his trials, and his dangers — not only hearing this poor, despised, and battered Paul, and acknowledging themselves as his disciples, but receiving and honoring him as an angel of God, yes, as Jesus Christ Himself. This is a remarkable testimony and a singular virtue of the Galatians — a commendation Paul gives to none of the other churches to whom he wrote.

Jerome and certain other ancient fathers interpret Paul's 'weakness of the flesh' as some physical illness or a struggle with lust. These men lived in an era when the church enjoyed outward peace and prosperity, free from any cross or persecution. At that time bishops were beginning to accumulate wealth, prestige, and worldly honor. Many of them also exercised tyranny over the people in their care, as church history records. Few did their duty, and those who appeared to do it abandoned the Gospel's teaching and promoted their own decrees. When pastors and bishops are not exercised in the word of God and neglect its pure and sincere proclamation, they inevitably fall into complacency — they are not tested by the temptations, the cross, and persecutions that unfailingly follow the pure preaching of the word. So it was impossible for them to understand Paul. But we, by God's grace, have sound and sincere teaching, which we preach and teach freely — and for this we are compelled to bear the bitter hatred, suffering, and persecution of the devil and the world. If we were not pressed outwardly by tyrants and sectarians with force and cunning, and inwardly by terrors and the devil's fiery arrows, Paul would be as obscure and unknown to us as he was to the whole world in earlier ages, and as he still is to the papists, the Anabaptists, and our other opponents. It is the gift of knowledge and the ability to understand Scripture

— combined with our diligence and our inward and outward trials — that opens for us the meaning of Paul and the sense of all of holy Scripture.

Paul therefore calls his 'weakness of the flesh' not a physical disease or temptation to lust, but the suffering and affliction he endured in his body — the opposite of spiritual strength and power. And lest we seem to force Paul's words, let us hear him speak for himself in 2 Corinthians 12: 'Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake — for when I am weak, then I am strong.' And in chapter 11: 'In labors far more, in imprisonments far more frequently, in beatings above measure, in danger of death often. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked.' These bodily afflictions are what he calls the weakness of the flesh — not any physical disease. As if he said: When I preached the Gospel among you, I was pressed down by various trials and afflictions. I was constantly in danger — from the Jews, from the Gentiles, and from false brothers. I suffered hunger and lacked everything. I was treated as the filth and refuse of the world. He refers to this weakness in many places — in 1 Corinthians 4; 2 Corinthians 4, 6, 11, 12, and many others.

We see, then, that Paul calls his bodily afflictions the weakness of the flesh — suffering he endured in the body, as the other apostles, the prophets, and all godly people did — while his spirit was mighty. The power of Christ was in him, always reigning and triumphing through him. He testifies to this in 2 Corinthians 12:

'When I am weak, then I am strong.' And: 'I will gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.' And in chapter 2: 'Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.' It is as if he said: Yes, the devil, the Jews, and the Gentiles rage against us savagely — yet we stand firm and unconquerable against all their attacks, and our teaching prevails and triumphs whether they like it or not. This was the strength and power of the Spirit in Paul, which he here contrasts with the weakness and bondage of the flesh.

This weakness of the flesh in believers is deeply offensive to human reason. Paul therefore praises the Galatians highly for not being offended by this great weakness and by the lowly and despised form of the cross they saw in him — but instead receiving him as an angel, indeed as Christ Himself. Christ also arms believers against this lowly and despised form in which He appeared, when He says: 'Blessed is the one who does not stumble because of Me' (Matthew 11:6). And truly it is a remarkable thing that those who believe in Him acknowledge Him as the Lord of all and the Savior of the world — the same One who is described as the most wretched of all, last among men, a laughingstock and the scum of the earth, despised and hated by all, condemned to death on a cross, and rejected even by His own people — especially by those who were considered the best, wisest, and holiest of all. It is a remarkable thing not to be shaken by such stumbling blocks — to be able not merely to look past them, but to value this poor Christ, so viciously mocked, spat upon, whipped, and crucified, more than all the wealth of the wealthiest, the strength of the strongest, the wisdom of the wisest, the holiness of the holiest, and all the crowns

and scepters of every king and prince in the world. Those who are not offended by Christ are rightly called blessed by Him (Psalm 21:7).

Paul endured not only outward trials — of which I have already spoken — but also inward and spiritual trials, as Christ did in the garden. One of these was what he describes in 2 Corinthians 12: a thorn in the flesh, and an angel of Satan to buffet him. I mention this in passing because the papists interpreted this as a temptation to fleshly lust — but it was a spiritual temptation. There is no contradiction in the fact that he adds the word 'flesh,' saying: 'A thorn was given to me in my flesh.' He deliberately calls it a thorn in the flesh. For the Galatians and others who knew Paul had often seen him in great anguish, terror, and heaviness of spirit. The apostles therefore had not only bodily trials but also spiritual ones, which Paul also acknowledges in 2 Corinthians 7: 'Conflicts on the outside, fears within.' Luke records in the final chapters of Acts that when Paul had long been battered in the storm at sea to the point of spiritual exhaustion, he was refreshed and strengthened when he saw the brothers who had come from Rome to meet him at the Market of Appius and the Three Taverns. And in Philippians 2, Paul acknowledges that God showed him mercy by restoring the sick and nearly-dead Epaphroditus to health, 'so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow' (Philippians 2:27). So besides outward trials, the apostles also suffered great anguish, heaviness, and terror of spirit.

But why does Paul say the Galatians did not despise him? It seems as if they did despise him, since they abandoned his Gospel. Paul is speaking of an earlier time. He is saying: when I first preached the Gospel to you, you did not do what most people did

— who, greatly offended by my weakness and bodily trials, despised and rejected me. Human reason is quickly offended by the lowly and despised form of the cross, and judges those who are so afflicted to be out of their minds for daring to comfort, help, and offer hope to others. It is offended by those who boast of great riches — righteousness, strength, victory over sin, death, and every evil, joy, salvation, and eternal life — while they themselves are needy, weak, downcast, despised, mistreated, and killed as dangerous pests to society and religion, their killers believing they are doing God a service. So when they promise eternal treasures to others while they themselves perish so miserably in the world's eyes, they are laughed to scorn and told: 'Physician, heal yourself.' This is the source of those laments that appear throughout the Psalms: 'I am a worm and not a man.' And: 'Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help' (Psalm 22:6, 11).

It is therefore a great commendation of the Galatians that they were not offended by this weakness and trial of Paul's, but received him as an angel of God — yes, as Christ Jesus Himself. It is indeed a great virtue worthy of high praise to hear the apostle. But it is an even greater and truly Christian virtue to open one's ears and heart to someone as wretched, weak, and despised as Paul was among the Galatians — as he himself testifies here — and to receive him as an angel from heaven and honor him as though he were Christ Jesus Himself, without being put off by so many and so great afflictions. Paul therefore praises the virtue of the Galatians in the highest terms. He says he will keep this in perpetual remembrance, and values it so highly that he wants it known to everyone. Yet in so generously recounting their kindness and praising them, he subtly shows how completely they loved him before the false apos-

tles arrived — and by doing so he urges them to continue as they began, and to embrace him with no less love and reverence than before. This also reveals that the false apostles had gained greater authority among the Galatians than Paul himself had. The Galatians, swayed by the false apostles' authority, had placed them far above Paul — the very Paul they had previously loved so dearly and received as an angel of God.

Verse 15. What then has become of your blessing?

It is as if he said: How blessed were you thought to be! How much were you praised and commended at that time! We have the same expression in the song of the virgin Mary: 'All generations will call me blessed.' These words — 'What then has become of your blessing?' — carry a certain force. It is as if he said: you were not just blessed, but in every way supremely blessed and most highly commended. By this he works to soften and temper his bitter medicine — that is, his sharp reproof — fearing the Galatians might be put off by it, especially knowing that the false apostles would slander him and twist his words with as much spite as possible. For this is the nature and habit of these vipers: they take words that come from a simple and sincere heart and slander them, wresting them completely away from their true meaning. They are remarkably skilled at this — surpassing the cleverness and eloquence of every rhetorician in the world. They are driven by a wicked spirit that so bewitches them that, burning with diabolical rage against believers, they can do nothing other than maliciously twist and wickedly distort what others say and write. They are like spiders that draw poison from sweet and pleasant flowers — not because of the flowers, but because of their own venomous nature, which turns what is good and wholesome into poison. Paul

therefore uses these gentle and sweet words to forestall the false apostles, so they could not seize the opportunity to slander him this way: 'Paul treats you harshly — he calls you foolish, bewitched, and disobedient to the truth. This is clear evidence that he is not seeking your salvation but considers you damned and rejected by Christ.'

Verse 15. For I testify about you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

He praises the Galatians without measure. 'You did not only treat me with the greatest courtesy and reverence,' he says, 'receiving me as an angel of God — but if it had been necessary, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Yes, you would have laid down your lives for me.' And indeed the Galatians did risk their lives for him — for in receiving and supporting Paul, whom the world regarded as utterly reprehensible and cursed, they drew upon their own heads the fierce hatred and hostility of Jews and Gentiles alike.

The same is true in our day. The name of Luther is most repugnant to the world. Whoever praises me commits a worse offense in the world's eyes than any idolater, blasphemer, perjurer, whoremonger, adulterer, murderer, or thief. The Galatians, then, must have been firmly grounded in the teaching and faith of Christ — for they received and supported Paul, who was hated throughout the entire world, at great personal danger. Otherwise they would never have borne the fierce hostility of the whole world.

Verse 16. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Here he explains why he has been speaking to the Galatians in such a gentle tone. He suspects they regard him as an enemy because he rebuked them so sharply. 'I beg you,' he says, 'set these rebukes aside and separate them from the teaching — and you will find that my purpose was not to rebuke you but to teach you the truth.' 'I admit that my letter is sharp and hard — but by this sharpness I am trying to call you back to the truth of the Gospel, from which you have fallen, and to keep you in it. Apply this sharpness and this bitter medicine not to your persons but to your disease. Do not judge me as your enemy because I have rebuked you so firmly — think of me rather as your father.' 'For if I did not love you dearly as my children, and if I did not know that you love me, I would never have rebuked you so forcefully.'

It is the mark of a true friend to freely warn his friend when he is doing something wrong. And when such a warning is given, the wise person is not angry with the friend who spoke the truth to him — he is grateful. It is a common observation in the world that truth breeds hatred and that the one who speaks truth is treated as an enemy. But this is not how it should be among friends — and still less among Christians. Since I have rebuked you out of pure love, so that you might remain in the truth, you should not be offended with me, nor abandon the truth, nor regard me as an enemy because of my fatherly correction. All of this is Paul's way of reinforcing what he said earlier: 'Become as I am. You have done me no wrong.'

Verse 17. They eagerly seek you, but not sincerely.

He is rebuking the flattery of the false apostles. Satan is accustomed to use his ministers to deceive simple people through extraordinary subtlety and cunning — as Paul says in Romans 16:

'Through smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the naive.' First, they make grand declarations that they seek nothing but the advancement of God's glory. They then claim to be moved by the Spirit — because the people are being neglected, or because the truth is not being taught purely by others — to proclaim the certain truth, so that the elect may be freed from error and come to the true light and knowledge. They also promise guaranteed salvation to those who receive their teaching. If vigilant and faithful pastors do not stand against these ravenous wolves, they will do enormous damage to the church under the pretense of godliness, all while wearing sheep's clothing. The Galatians might have asked: 'Why do you speak so harshly against our teachers, just because they care about us? What they do they do out of zeal and genuine love — this should not bother you.' Paul answers: 'Yes, they do pursue you eagerly — but their zeal is not genuine.'

Note here that 'zeal' or 'jealousy' properly means a fierce love — what you might call a godly intensity of feeling. Elijah said: 'I have been very zealous for the Lord of hosts.' In this way a husband is zealous toward his wife, a father toward his son, a brother toward his brother — that is, they love them wholeheartedly, yet they hate their vices and work to correct them. The false apostles claimed to have this kind of zeal toward the Galatians. Paul acknowledges that they were very zealous toward the Galatians — but their zeal, he says, was not genuine. This is the very ploy by which simple people are deceived: seducers convince them that they bear great zeal and affection toward them and are deeply concerned for their wellbeing. Paul therefore warns us here to distinguish between a good zeal and an evil one. A good zeal is praiseworthy — an evil one is not. 'I am as zealous over you as they are,'

Paul is saying. 'Now you judge which of our zeals is better — mine or theirs — which is good and godly, and which is evil and self-serving.' Do not let their zeal deceive you so easily. For —

Verse 17. They want to shut you out so that you will seek them.

As if he said: True, they are very zealous toward you — but what they are really after is that you will be zealous toward them in return, and that you will reject me. If their zeal were sincere and godly, they would be content for you to love me as well as them. But they hate our teaching, and their desire is to see it completely overthrown and replaced with their own among you. To accomplish this, they use this show of zeal to pull your hearts away from me and make me repugnant in your eyes — so that once you have developed hatred toward me and my teaching, and turned your affection and zeal toward them, you will love them alone and receive no other teaching but theirs. In this way Paul raises suspicion among the Galatians about the false apostles, showing that this fine-sounding pretense is their means of deception. Our Savior Christ gives us the same warning: 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing' (Matthew 7:15).

Paul endured the same trial we face today. He was deeply troubled by the fact that after the preaching of his divinely given teaching, he saw so many sects, uprisings, disruptions of societies, changes in governments, and such like things follow — causing endless harm and offense. He was accused by the Jews of being a dangerous agitator, a stirrer of rebellion throughout the nation, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). As if they had said: 'This man is a seditious blasphemer — for he preaches things that not only overthrow the Jewish commonwealth, so excellently ordered and established by God's laws, but also abolish

the Ten Commandments, true religion and worship of God, and our priesthood — and all this while spreading his so-called Gospel throughout the world, from which endless evils, uprisings, offenses, and sects have sprung.' He also had to endure the cries of the Gentiles in Philippi, who accused him of disturbing their city and preaching customs that were not lawful for them to follow (Acts 16:20-21).

Such public disturbances, along with other calamities like famine, wars, division, and sectarianism, were all blamed by the Jews and Gentiles on the teaching of Paul and the other apostles — so they were persecuted as common plagues and enemies of public peace and religion. Yet despite all this, the apostles never stopped fulfilling their calling — they preached and confessed Christ with unwavering steadiness. For they knew they must obey God rather than people, and that it is better for the whole world to be in an uproar than for Christ not to be preached or for a single soul to be neglected and lost (Acts 5:29).

But these offenses were undoubtedly a heavy cross to the apostles — for they were not made of stone. It caused them extraordinary grief to see the very people for whose sake Paul said he wished to be separated from Christ perishing along with all their heritage. They could see that great upheavals and the collapse of kingdoms would follow in the wake of their teaching. And — what was more bitter to them than death itself, especially to Paul — they saw that even within their own communities many sects were breaking out. It was painful news to Paul when he heard that the Corinthians were denying the resurrection of the dead — when he heard that churches established through his ministry were being

disrupted, that the Gospel was being overturned by false apostles, and that all of Asia and some prominent individuals had turned away from his teaching.

But he knew that his teaching was not the cause of these offenses and sects — and so he was not discouraged. He did not abandon his calling but pressed forward, knowing that the Gospel he preached was the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes — however much it appeared to Jews and Gentiles to be a foolish and offensive message. He knew that those who are not offended by the word of the cross are blessed — whether teachers or hearers — as Christ Himself says: 'Blessed is the one who does not stumble because of Me.' On the other hand, he knew that those who judged this teaching to be foolish and heretical were condemned. And so he said of the Jews and Gentiles who were offended by this teaching, as Christ had said before him: 'Leave them alone — they are blind guides of the blind.'

We too are compelled today to hear what was said of Paul and the other apostles: that the Gospel teaching we profess is the cause of great disturbances — of uprisings, wars, sects, and endless offenses. They lay every present trouble at our door. Yet we teach no heresy or wicked doctrine. We preach the good news about Christ — that He is our High Priest and our Redeemer. Furthermore, our opponents are forced to admit — if they are willing to be honest — that our teaching has not caused uprisings, wars, or tumults. We have always taught that honor and obedience must be given to governing authorities, because God commands it. We are not the authors of offenses. If the wicked are offended, the fault lies with them, not with us. God has commanded us to preach the Gospel without regard to who takes offense. But because this teaching

condemns the corrupt doctrine and idolatry of our opponents, they take offense at being condemned — and the offenses that result from their own provocation are what the scholars called 'offenses taken,' which they correctly said should not and cannot be avoided.

Christ taught the Gospel without any concern for the offense it caused the Jews. 'Leave them,' He said. 'They are blind leaders of the blind.' The more the priests forbade the apostles to preach in the name of Christ, the more boldly the apostles declared that this same Jesus whom they had crucified is both Lord and Christ — and that whoever calls on His name will be saved, and that there is no other name given to people under heaven by which they can be saved.

We preach Christ in the same way today, without heeding the outcry of the wicked papists and all our other opponents, who shout that our teaching is seditious and blasphemous — that it disturbs societies, overturns religion, spreads heresy, and is the root cause of every evil. When Christ and His apostles preached, the same things were said of them. Not long after, the Romans came and — fulfilling their own prophecy — destroyed both the city and the nation. Let the enemies of the Gospel today therefore take care that they are not crushed under the very evils they are predicting for us.

They call it a grave and terrible offense that monks and priests marry wives, that we eat meat on Fridays, and things like that. But it is no offense to them at all that their corrupt teaching daily seduces and destroys countless souls — that by their evil example they cause the weak to stumble — that they blaspheme and condemn the Gospel of the glory of the mighty God — and that they persecute and kill those who love sound teaching and the word of

life. This, to them, is no offense. It is obedience, service, and an acceptable sacrifice to God. Let us leave them then — for they are blind leaders of the blind. 'Let the one who does harm continue to do harm, and let the one who is vile continue in his vileness.' But we, because we believe, will declare the wonderful works of the Lord as long as we have breath, and will endure the persecution of our opponents until Christ our High Priest and King comes from heaven — whom we hope will come soon as a just judge to take vengeance on all who do not obey His Gospel. So be it.

These offenses that the wicked allege do not move believers at all — for they know that the devil hates nothing more than the pure teaching of the Gospel, and therefore works to discredit it with endless offenses in order to root it out of people's hearts entirely. Before, when nothing was taught in the church but human tradition, the devil did not rage like this. While the strong man guarded his house, everything he held was at peace. But when a stronger man comes who overpowers him, binds him, and plunders his house — then the strong man begins to rage. This is an unmistakable sign that the teaching we profess is from God. For otherwise — as it says of Behemoth in Job 40 — he would lie hidden under the trees, sheltered in the reeds and marshes. But now that he roams about like a roaring lion and stirs up such uproar, it is a clear sign that he feels the power of our preaching.

When Paul says 'they are zealous over you but not sincerely,' he reveals in passing who the true authors of sects are: these zealous spirits who in every age overturn true teaching and disturb the peace. Driven by a perverse zeal, they imagine they possess a unique holiness, humility, patience, and insight surpassing all others — and so they believe they alone can care for the salvation of

all, that they can teach deeper and more profitable things, and establish better worship and ceremonies than any other teacher. They despise all other teachers as worthless by comparison, undermine their authority, and corrupt what they have purely taught. The false apostles had exactly this wicked and perverse zeal, stirring up sects not only in Galatia but in every place where Paul and the other apostles had preached — and from these sects came endless offenses and extraordinary upheaval. For the devil, as Christ says, is a liar and a murderer — and so he is accustomed not only to trouble people's consciences through false teaching, but also to stir up turmoil, rebellion, and wars.

There are many in Germany today who are possessed by this kind of zeal — who display great shows of religion, humility, learning, and patience, yet in reality are ravenous wolves. Their hypocrisy has one goal: to discredit us so that people will admire, love, and revere them alone and accept no other teaching but theirs (Matthew 7:15). Since these men have such a high opinion of themselves and despise everyone else, terrible divisions, sects, splits, and uprisings inevitably follow. But what can we do? We cannot fix this — any more than Paul could in his day. He did, however, win some who listened to his warnings. So I hope that we too have called some back from the errors of the sectarians.

Verse 18. It is good to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner at all times, and not only when I am present with you.

It is as if he said: I commend you for this — that you loved me so wholeheartedly when I preached the Gospel among you in weakness and frailty. You ought to have kept the same affection toward me now in my absence, just as if I had never left. For even though I am absent in body, you still have my teaching — and you

should hold on to it and uphold it, since you received the Holy Spirit through it. Remind yourselves: Paul is always present with us as long as we have his teaching. I am not rebuking your zeal — I praise it, and I praise it to the extent that it is the zeal of God and the Spirit, and not of the flesh. The Spirit's zeal is always good, because it is a sincere and earnest movement of the heart toward what is truly good — unlike the flesh's zeal. He praises the Galatians' zeal in order to calm their spirits so they can receive his correction with a patient heart. It is as if he said: Receive my correction as something meant for your good — it comes not from an angry heart but from a grieving one that is deeply concerned for your salvation. This is a vivid example to teach all ministers how to care for their people, and to try every approach — whether reproof, encouragement, or appeal — to keep them in sound teaching and turn them away from cunning deceivers and false teachers.

Verse 19. My children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

Every word Paul uses is carefully chosen to move the hearts of the Galatians and win back their goodwill. Calling them 'my children' is tender and warm. When he says 'for whom I am in the anguish of childbirth,' it is a figure of speech. Apostles stand in the place of parents — as schoolmasters also do in their own calling. Just as parents give birth to the physical form, ministers give birth to the form of the mind. The form of a Christian mind is faith — the confident trust of the heart that lays hold of Christ and clings to Him and nothing else. A heart furnished with this confidence — the assurance that for Christ's sake we are righteous — bears the true form of Christ. This form is given through the ministry of the word, as it is written (1 Corinthians 4:15): 'I became your father in

Christ Jesus through the Gospel' — meaning, in spirit, so that you would know Christ and believe in Him. And in 2 Corinthians 3:3: 'You are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.' The word goes out from the mouth of the apostle or minister and enters the heart of the hearer — and there the Holy Spirit is present, impressing the word into the heart so that it receives and consents to it. In this way every godly teacher is a father, who brings forth and shapes the true form of a Christian heart through the ministry of the word.

With these words — 'for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth' — he also takes a shot at the false apostles. It is as if he said: I rightly gave birth to you through the Gospel, but these corrupters have fashioned a new form in your hearts — not the form of Christ but the form of Moses. Your trust is no longer anchored in Christ but in the works of the law. This is not the true form of Christ. It is a different form entirely — a diabolical one. He does not say 'until my form is fashioned in you,' but 'until Christ is formed in you' — meaning: I am laboring so that you may receive again the form and likeness of Christ, not of Paul. In these words he once again rebukes the false apostles — for they had destroyed the form of Christ in the hearts of believers and replaced it with their own, as he says in Galatians 6:13: 'They want you to be circumcised so that they can boast about your flesh.'

He also speaks of this form of Christ in Colossians 3:10: 'Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.' Paul is working to restore in the Galatians the form of Christ that the false apostles had distorted and destroyed — that is, the shape of thinking, speaking, and willing as God does. God's thought and will is that we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal

life through Jesus Christ His only Son, whom He sent into the world to be the propitiation for our sins, so that we would know that through His Son He has been reconciled to us and become our loving Father. Those who believe this are conformed to God — all their thoughts are shaped by God, as their heart's desire is shaped by Him. They carry in their minds the same form that God and Jesus Christ have. This is what it means to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new self, 'which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth,' as Paul says in Ephesians 4:24.

He says, then, that he is in labor again for the Galatians — yet in such a way that the form taking shape in them is not the form of the apostle himself, not the likeness of Paul or of Cephas, but the likeness of another Father: Christ. 'I will form Him in you,' he says, 'so that you may be like-minded in all things to Christ Himself.' In short: I am in labor for you — meaning: I am working earnestly to call you back to the faith you once had, which you have lost by being deceived through the craftiness of the false apostles, and have turned away from back to the law and to works. I must therefore labor again, carefully, to bring you from the law back to faith in Christ. This is what he calls being in the anguish of childbirth.

Verse 20. I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone.

These are the genuine concerns of an apostle. There is a common saying that a letter is a poor messenger — it can give no more than what is written in it. And no letter, however carefully composed, is without its limitations. Circumstances vary: times, places, people, moods, and situations all differ — and no letter can account for all of these. So a letter affects the reader in different ways

— making him sad one moment, hopeful the next, depending on his own state of mind. But if something has been said too sharply or at the wrong moment, a person's living voice can explain, soften, or correct it. The apostle therefore wishes he were with them so he could adjust and modulate his voice as he could see the situation required. If he saw someone deeply troubled, he could temper his words so as not to add to their distress. If he saw others who were proud and complacent, he could rebuke them sharply so they would not become indifferent and begin to despise God.

He simply did not know how, being absent, to handle them rightly by letter. It is as if he said: If my letter is too harsh, I fear I will drive some of you away rather than help you. If it is too gentle, it will do nothing for those who are stubborn and set in their ways — for a written letter can only give what it contains. A living human voice, compared to a letter, is like a queen — it can add and subtract, shift its tone to match every mood, time, place, and person. In short: I wish I could bring you back by letter — call you back from the law to faith in Jesus Christ — but I fear that these dead words on a page will not accomplish it. If I were with you, I could change my tone — rebuking sharply those who are hardened, and comforting the weak with gentle and loving words, as the moment required.

Verse 20. For I am perplexed about you.

That is: I am so troubled in spirit that I do not know how to conduct myself toward you even in a letter. This is a vivid portrait of the true feelings of an apostle. He leaves nothing unused: he rebukes the Galatians, he appeals to them, he speaks tenderly, he praises their faith warmly — working by every means to bring them back to the truth of the Gospel and rescue them from the

snares of the false apostles. These are powerful words, coming from a heart stirred and fired with an intense burning zeal — and they deserve careful attention.

Verse 21. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law — do you not listen to the law?

At this point Paul intended to close the letter — he had no desire to write more but wished instead to be present with the Galatians and speak to them in person. But being in great distress and deeply concerned about the situation, he takes up an allegory that came to mind. People are greatly moved by allegories and comparisons — which is why Christ Himself used them so frequently. Allegories are like pictures: they set things out as if painted before the eyes of the listener, and so they move and persuade powerfully — especially simple and untaught people. Paul therefore stirs up the Galatians first with words and argument, and then paints the whole matter before their eyes with this vivid allegory.

Paul was a remarkably skilled craftsman when it came to allegories — he consistently applied them to the teaching of faith, grace, and Christ, and not to the law and its works, as Origen and Jerome did. Those two have been rightly criticized for turning straightforward passages of Scripture — where allegory has no business — into far-fetched and inappropriate allegories. Using allegories is therefore often a dangerous thing. Unless a person has a thorough understanding of Christian teaching, he cannot use allegories rightly.

But why does Paul call the book of Genesis — from which he draws the story of Ishmael and Isaac — 'the law,' when Genesis contains no law as such? The passage he quotes speaks of no law at all — it is simply a historical account of Abraham's two sons. Paul follows the Jewish custom of calling the first book of Moses 'the law,' even though it contains virtually no laws besides the law of circumcision, and its primary teaching is about faith — that the patriarchs pleased God by faith. But because the law of circumcision is in the book, the Jews called Genesis 'the law' along with the other books of Moses. Paul, himself a Jew, followed the same usage. Christ also uses 'the law' to include not only the books of Moses but the Psalms as well, as in John 15: 'But the word must be fulfilled that is written in their Law: They hated Me without cause.'

Verses 22-23. For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through the promise.

It is as if he said: You are turning away from grace, faith, and Christ, and going back to the law — you want to be under the law and to find wisdom through it. Very well, then — let me speak to you about the law. Listen carefully to what the law says. You will find that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael by Hagar, and Isaac by Sarah. Both were Abraham's true sons. Ishmael was just as much the true son of Abraham as Isaac was — both came from one father, one flesh, one seed. So what was the difference? The difference, Paul says, is not simply that one mother was a slave and the other free — though that does belong to the allegory. The real difference is that Ishmael, born of the slave woman, was born according to the flesh — that is, without the promise and the word of

God. Isaac, by contrast, was born not only of the free woman but also according to the promise. But wait — was Isaac not also born of Abraham's natural seed, just as Ishmael was? Yes, both were children of the same father — and yet there is a difference. For although Isaac was also born of the flesh, the promise came first. Only Paul observed this distinction, which he drew from the text of Genesis in this way.

When Hagar conceived and bore Ishmael, there was no word of God foretelling it. With Sarah's permission, Abraham went to his servant Hagar, whom Sarah — being barren — had given to Abraham as a wife, as the book of Genesis records. Sarah had heard that according to God's promise, Abraham would have a child from his own body, and she hoped to be the mother of that child. But after waiting many long years with great anguish of spirit and seeing the promise still delayed, she lost hope. This holy woman therefore, out of love and honor for her husband, stepped aside and gave up her own right to another — her servant. She did not bring an outside wife into the home. Instead she gave Abraham her own servant in marriage, hoping that she herself might be built up through her. As the record says (Genesis 16): 'Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram: Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.' This was a great act of humility on Sarah's part — she humbled herself deeply and accepted this trial and testing of her faith with grace. For she reasoned: God is not a liar. What He promised to my husband He will certainly carry out. But perhaps God does not intend

that I should be the mother of that child. It would not grieve me if Hagar were given that honor — let my husband go to her, for perhaps I may be built up through her.

Ishmael was therefore born without any word or promise from God — only at Sarah's request. There is no word of God commanding Abraham to do this, or promising him a son through this means. It was done as a human plan, which Sarah's own words reflect: 'It may be that I shall obtain children by her.' Since no word of God was spoken to Abraham before Ishmael's birth — as there was when Sarah was to bear Isaac — it is clear enough that Ishmael was Abraham's son only by natural descent, without the word of God. He was born by human initiative, unexpectedly, like any other child. This is the distinction Paul observed and drew upon.

In Romans 9, Paul develops the same argument that he here presents in allegorical form, concluding powerfully that not all of Abraham's sons are sons of God. Abraham has two kinds of children, he says. Some are born from his flesh and blood, but the word and promise of God precedes their birth — like Isaac. Others are born without the promise — like Ishmael. Therefore, he says, the children of the flesh are not the children of God — only the children of the promise are. With this argument he firmly silences the proud Jews who boasted of being the seed and children of Abraham — as Christ also does in Matthew 3 and John 8. It does not follow, he is saying, that because I am the natural descendant of Abraham I am therefore a child of God — any more than it follows that Esau, being the natural son, is therefore the heir. Rather, those who wish to be children of Abraham must, beyond their nat-

ural birth, also be children of the promise — they must believe. The true children of Abraham — and therefore of God — are those who have the promise and believe it.

Ishmael, because he was not promised by God to Abraham, is a son only by natural descent, not by the promise — and so he was born by natural circumstances, as other children are. No mother knows in advance whether she will have a child, and even when she perceives she is pregnant, she cannot know whether it will be a son or a daughter. But Isaac was named explicitly: the angel said to Abraham (Genesis 17), 'Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.' Both the son and the mother are named explicitly. In this way, God rewarded Sarah's humility — she had stepped aside and endured the contempt of Hagar (Genesis 16) — by honoring her as the mother of the promised son.

Verse 24. Now these things contain an allegory.

Allegories do not prove a point or persuade powerfully in theological argument — they function more like illustrations that beautify and clarify what has already been established. If Paul had not already proven the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of works with strong and compelling arguments, this allegory alone would have accomplished little. But because he had already secured his case with unassailable arguments drawn from experience, from Abraham's example, from the testimony of Scripture, and from analogies, he now adds an allegory at the conclusion of his argument — to adorn everything he has already demonstrated. It is fitting, once a foundation has been firmly laid and a matter thoroughly proven, to add an allegory for beauty and clarity. For

just as painting decorates and beautifies a house that has already been built, so an allegory illuminates a matter that has already been proved and established by other means.

Verses 24-25. For these women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery — she is Hagar. (Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.)

Abraham represents God, who has two sons — that is, two kinds of people are represented by Ishmael and Isaac. These two are born to him through Hagar and Sarah, who signify the two covenants — the old and the new. The old covenant is from Mount Sinai, producing children for bondage — this is Hagar. The Arabs call by the name 'Hagar' the very mountain the Jews call Sinai — which appears to take its name from thorns and brambles — as Ptolemy and the Greek commentators confirm. Many mountains in this way carry different names depending on the nation that names them. So the mountain Moses calls Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonians and Senir by the Amorites.

It is very fitting to this purpose that in the Arabic language, Mount Sinai means something like 'servant girl' — and I think this similarity of meaning gave Paul the opening he needed to develop this allegory. Just as Hagar the slave woman bore Abraham a son who was not an heir but a servant, so Sinai — the allegorical Hagar — bore God a son: that is, a people after the flesh. And just as Ishmael was truly Abraham's son, so the people of Israel had the true God as their Father, who gave them His law, His oracles, true religion and worship, and the temple — as the Psalm says (Psalm 147:19): 'He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His rules to Israel.' But there was this one difference: Ishmael was born of a slave woman by natural descent — that is, without the promise —

and could therefore not be the heir. So the allegorical Hagar — that is, Mount Sinai, where the law was given and the old covenant established — bore God (who is the great Abraham) a people, but without the promise: a people after the flesh, in bondage, not heirs of God. For the promises concerning Christ the giver of all blessing, deliverance from the curse of the law, from sin and death, free forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life — these are not attached to the law. The law only says: 'He who does these things shall live by them.'

The promises of the law are therefore conditional — they offer life not freely but to those who fulfill the law, and so they leave people's consciences in perpetual uncertainty, since no one actually fulfills the law. But the promises of the new covenant carry no such condition attached to them. They require nothing of us and do not depend on any condition of our worthiness. They freely bring and give us forgiveness of sins, grace, righteousness, and eternal life — for Christ's sake — as I have treated more thoroughly elsewhere.

The law, or the old covenant, therefore contains only conditional promises — always with conditions attached such as: 'If you obey My voice, if you keep My statutes, if you walk in My ways, you shall be My people.' The Jews, not grasping this, took hold of those conditional promises as if they were unconditional and absolute — as if God were permanently obligated to keep them regardless of Israel's conduct. So when the prophets foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, the kingdom, and the priesthood — the prophets who rightly distinguished the earthly promises of the law from the spiritual promises concerning Christ and His kingdom —

the people persecuted and killed them as heretics and blasphemers. They could not see the condition that was attached: 'If you keep My commandments, it will go well with you.'

The slave woman Hagar therefore brings forth only slaves. Ishmael is not the heir — even though he is Abraham's natural son — but remains a bondman. What is missing? The promise and the blessing of the word. In the same way, the law given on Mount Sinai — which the Arabs call Hagar — produces nothing but servants. For the promise concerning Christ was not attached to the law. Therefore — O Galatians — if you forsake the promise and faith and fall back to the law and works, you will always remain servants. You will never be delivered from sin and death but will stay under the curse of the law forever. For Hagar does not produce children of the promise or heirs — that is, the law does not justify. It does not bring adoption and inheritance. It hinders the inheritance and produces wrath.

Verse 25. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

This is a remarkable allegory. Paul has just made Hagar into Mount Sinai — and now one would expect him to make Sarah into Jerusalem. But he dares not, and cannot. Instead he is compelled to link Jerusalem with Mount Sinai. He says: the same belongs to Hagar — for the mountain of Hagar stretches all the way to Jerusalem. And in fact there is a continuous mountain range running from rocky Arabia to Kadesh Barnea in Judah. He says, then, that this present Jerusalem — this earthly, temporal Jerusalem — is not Sarah. It belongs to Hagar, because Hagar rules there. In it the law reigns, producing bondage. In it are worship and cere-

monies, the temple, the kingdom, the priesthood. Everything ordained on Sinai by the mother who is the law is carried out in Jerusalem. 'Therefore I link her with Sinai, and I include both under a single heading — Sinai or Hagar.'

I myself would never have been bold enough to handle this allegory this way. I would rather have called Jerusalem Sarah and the new covenant — especially since the Gospel's proclamation began there, the Holy Spirit was given there, and the people of the new covenant were born there. I would have thought I had found a very fitting allegory. This is why not everyone should use allegories as they please — a plausible outward appearance can easily mislead and cause error. Who would not think it fitting to call Sinai 'Hagar' and Jerusalem 'Sarah'? Paul does make Jerusalem into Sarah — but not this earthly, physical Jerusalem, which he simply classifies alongside Hagar. The Jerusalem he calls Sarah is the spiritual and heavenly one — not the one that is in bondage with its children, not the one where the law and the carnal people reign, but the one where the promise reigns and where a spiritual and free people dwell.

And so that the law and the entire kingdom established in Hagar might be completely abolished, the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed in a catastrophic way — along with all its treasures, the temple, the ceremonies, and everything else. Although the new covenant began in Jerusalem and spread from there throughout the world, that city still belongs to Hagar — that is, it is the city of the law, of the ceremonies, and of the priesthood established by Moses. In short, it was born of Hagar the slave woman, and therefore it remains in bondage with its children. It walks in the works of the law and never attains the freedom of the Spirit, but remains

perpetually under the law, under sin, a guilty conscience, the wrath and judgment of God, and the guilt of death and hell. Yes, it has the freedom of the flesh — a physical kingdom, civil rulers, wealth, property, and such things. But we are speaking of the freedom of the Spirit, by which we are dead to the law, to sin and death, and we live and reign in grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life. The earthly Jerusalem cannot provide this — and so it remains with Hagar.

Verse 26. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

That earthly Jerusalem below, he says, with its laws and ordinances, belongs to Hagar and is in bondage with her children — that is, she is not delivered from the law, from sin and death. But the Jerusalem that is above — the spiritual Jerusalem — is Sarah. Paul does not actually use Sarah's name here, but gives her another title, calling her the free woman: that is, the true mistress and freewoman who is the mother of us all, giving birth to children for freedom, not for bondage as Hagar does.

Now, this heavenly Jerusalem that is above is the church — that is, believers scattered throughout the whole world who share one Gospel, one faith in Christ, one Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments.

Do not understand the word 'above' as the schoolmen do, referring to the church triumphant in heaven — but as referring to the church militant here on earth, as it is called. Believers are said to have their citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20) — not in terms of physical location, but because by faith they lay hold of inestimable, heavenly, and eternal gifts, and so they are in heaven

(Ephesians 1:3): 'Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.' We must therefore distinguish between heavenly, spiritual blessings and earthly ones. Earthly blessings include good government in communities and households, children, peace, wealth, the fruits of the earth, and other physical goods. Heavenly blessings include: deliverance from the law, sin, and death; justification and being made alive; peace with God; a trusting heart, a joyful conscience, and spiritual consolation; the knowledge of Jesus Christ; the gift of prophecy and the understanding of Scripture; the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and joy in God. These are the heavenly blessings that Christ gives to His church.

Jerusalem that is above — the heavenly Jerusalem — is therefore the church as it now exists in the world, not the city of the life to come or the church triumphant, as the idle and ignorant monks and scholastic theologians imagined. They taught that Scripture has four senses: the literal, the figurative, the allegorical, and the moral — and by these four senses they foolishly interpreted almost every word of Scripture. By this scheme, 'Jerusalem' literally meant the historical city; figuratively, a pure conscience; allegorically, the church militant; and morally, the heavenly city or the church triumphant. With these trivial and childish interpretations they carved the Scriptures into so many different meanings that simple believers could receive no certain teaching from them on anything. But Paul says here plainly that the old, earthly Jerusalem belongs to Hagar, that it is in bondage with its children, and that it is completely abolished. The new and heavenly Jerusalem — which is a queen and a free woman — is placed by God on earth, not in heaven, to be the mother of us all, through whom we have been born and are being born daily. It is therefore necessary that this

our mother be here on earth among people, since her children are here as well. Yet she gives birth through the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of the word and sacraments — not through the flesh.

I say this so that in this matter we would not let our thoughts drift off into heaven, but would understand that when Paul sets 'Jerusalem which is above' against the earthly Jerusalem, he means a spiritual distinction, not a geographical one. For there is a distinction between spiritual things and physical or earthly things. Spiritual things are 'above,' earthly things are 'below' — so Jerusalem which is above is distinguished from the physical, temporal Jerusalem which is below, not in terms of location (as I said) but in terms of its spiritual nature. This spiritual Jerusalem, though it had its beginnings in the physical Jerusalem, has no fixed location the way the other did in Judea. It is spread throughout the whole world and may be found in Babylon, in Turkey, in Tartary, in Scythia, in Judea, in Italy, in Germany, in the islands of the sea, in mountains and valleys, and in every place on earth where people have the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ.

Sarah — or Jerusalem our free mother — is the church itself, the bride of Christ, from whom we are all born. This mother continually gives birth to free children until the end of the world, as long as she carries out the ministry of the word — that is, as long as she preaches and publishes the Gospel. This is what it truly means to give birth. She teaches the Gospel this way: that we are delivered from the curse of the law, from sin, death, and every evil through Jesus Christ — not through the law or through works. Therefore Jerusalem that is above — the church — is not subject to

the law and works. She is free and a mother, without law, sin, or death. And such as this mother is, such are the children she brings forth.

This allegory teaches very fittingly that the church's one task is to preach and teach the Gospel truly and sincerely, and through this to give birth to children. In this way we are all fathers and children to one another — for we give birth to one another. I, having been born through the Gospel by others, now give birth to others through it, who will in turn give birth to still others — and so this birthing will continue until the end of the world. I am speaking of the generation, not of Hagar the slave woman, who gives birth to bondservants through the law, but of Sarah the free woman, who gives birth to heirs without the law and without any human works or effort. Isaac is the heir — not Ishmael — even though both were natural sons of Abraham. Isaac received the inheritance through the word of promise: 'Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.' Sarah understood this clearly, and so she said: 'Cast out the slave woman and her son' — which Paul also quotes shortly after. Just as Isaac received his father's inheritance through the promise and through birth alone — without the law and without works — so we are born through the Gospel of that free woman Sarah, as true heirs of the promise. She — that is, the church — instructs us, nourishes us, carries us in her womb, holds us in her arms, and forms us into the image of Christ until we grow up to full maturity. All of this happens through the ministry of the word. Therefore the free woman's office is to give birth to children for God her husband — without ceasing and without end — children who know that they are justified by faith and not by the law.

Verse 27. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.'

Paul quotes this passage from Isaiah, which is entirely allegorical. It is written, he says, that the mother of many children — the one with a husband — will waste away and die. And the barren one who has no children will have an abundance of children. Hannah sings in the same vein in her song (1 Samuel 2), which was the source from which Isaiah drew his prophecy: 'The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who had many children is forlorn.' What a remarkable reversal: the fruitful will be made barren, and the barren will be made fruitful. Those who were once strong, full, wealthy, honored, righteous, and blessed will become weak, hungry, poor, disgraced, sinful, and subject to death and condemnation — while those who were weak and hungry will become strong and satisfied.

By this allegory from the prophet Isaiah, Paul illustrates the difference between Hagar and Sarah — between the synagogue and the church, between the law and the Gospel. The law, as the husband of the fruitful woman — that is, of the synagogue — produces very many children. For people of every age and station — not only the uneducated, but the wisest and most accomplished — that is, all of humanity except the children of the free woman — know no righteousness other than the righteousness of the law. They have

no knowledge of any righteousness more excellent. So they consider themselves righteous when they follow the law and perform its works outwardly.

Yet even though they are fruitful, have many disciples, and shine in the righteousness and glorious works of the law — they are not free but enslaved. For they are children of Hagar, who gives birth to bondage. Since they are servants, they cannot share in the inheritance — they will be cast out of the house. For servants do not remain in the house forever. In fact, they are already excluded from the kingdom of grace and freedom. For whoever does not believe is already condemned. They remain therefore under the curse of the law, under sin and death, under the power of the devil, and under the wrath and judgment of God.

Now, if even the moral law — the Ten Commandments of God — can produce nothing but servants, that is, cannot justify but only terrify, accuse, condemn, and drive people's consciences to despair — then how, I ask you, could the laws of men or the laws of the Pope possibly justify? These are the doctrines of demons. Those who teach human traditions or even the law of God as necessary for obtaining righteousness before God can produce nothing but servants. And yet such teachers are regarded as the finest of men. They win the world's favor and are considered the most productive mothers — for they have an enormous number of disciples. Human reason does not understand what faith and true godliness are, and so it neglects and despises them. By nature it is drawn to superstition and hypocrisy — that is, to the righteousness of works. And because this works-righteousness is visible and glorious everywhere, it rules like a great empress over the whole world. Those who teach righteousness by works and the law produce many chil-

dren who appear on the outside to be free — who display an impressive show of virtue — but whose consciences are slaves and bondservants of sin. They are therefore to be cast out of the house and condemned.

Sarah the free woman — that is, the true church — appears, by contrast, to be barren. The Gospel, which is the word of the cross and of affliction, does not shine as brilliantly as the teaching of the law and works — and so the church does not attract nearly as many disciples. Beyond that, she carries the reputation of forbidding good works, making people lazy, careless, and irresponsible, stirring up heresies and uprisings, and being the cause of every kind of evil. So she appears to bear no fruit and to leave nothing behind but barrenness, desolation, and despair. The wicked are thoroughly convinced that the church with her teaching cannot endure long. The Jews assured themselves that the church planted by the apostles would soon be overthrown — calling it by the contemptuous name 'this sect,' as they said to Paul in Acts 28: 'Concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.' And how many times have our opponents predicted our certain destruction — fixing one deadline, then another — and been proven wrong? Christ and His apostles were crushed. Yet after their deaths the Gospel spread further than during their lifetimes. Our opponents may crush us today — but the word of God will abide forever. However barren and forsaken, weak and despised, and outwardly persecuted the church may appear — however much she is compelled to hear the reproach that her teaching is heretical and seditious — she alone is fruitful before God. Through the ministry of the word she gives birth to an infinite number of children, heirs of righteousness and eternal life. Outwardly they suffer persecution,

but in spirit they are completely free — not only judges over all doctrines and works, but also victorious conquerors over the gates of hell.

The prophet therefore acknowledges that the church is in distress — otherwise he would not exhort her to rejoice. He grants that she appears barren before the world — otherwise he would not call her barren and forsaken, without children. But before God she is fruitful, and so he calls her to rejoice. It is as if he said: Yes, you are forsaken and barren — you do not have the law as your husband, and so you have no children. But rejoice! For although you do not have the law as your husband — although you are forsaken like a young woman who should be married but has been abandoned (for he does not call her a widow, but one who should have had a husband if he had not left or been taken away) — you who are solitary and forsaken by your husband the law, and not bound in the marriage of the law, will be the mother of countless children. The people and church of the new covenant are completely without the law in their conscience — and so they appear forsaken in the world's eyes. Yet however barren she may seem without the law and without works, she is supremely fruitful before God and brings forth an infinite number of children — not in bondage but in freedom. By what means? Not through the law, but through the word and Spirit of Jesus Christ, given through the Gospel — by which she conceives, bears, and nourishes her children.

Paul therefore makes the difference between the law and the Gospel plain through this allegory — first by calling Hagar the old covenant and Sarah the new, then by calling one a slave and the other a free woman, and then by saying that the married and fruitful woman has become barren and been cast out of the house with

her children. The barren and forsaken one, by contrast, has become fruitful and brings forth an infinite number of children — and they are heirs. These contrasts represent the two kinds of people: the people of faith and the people of the law. The people of faith do not have the law as their husband. They do not serve in bondage. They are not born of that Jerusalem which now is. Instead they have the promise, they are free, and they are born of the free woman Sarah.

Paul therefore separates the spiritual people of the new covenant from the people of the law, by saying that the spiritual people are not children of Hagar the slave, but of Sarah the free woman — who has nothing to do with the law. By this he places the people of faith entirely above and outside the law. Now, if they are above and outside the law, then they are justified by spiritual birth alone — which is nothing other than faith — and not by the law or its works. And just as the people of grace neither have nor can have the law, so the people of the law neither have nor can have grace — for the law and grace cannot stand together. We must therefore either be justified by faith and let go of the righteousness of the law, or be justified by the law and let go of the righteousness of faith. But letting go of grace to return to the law is a terrible and grievous loss. Letting go of the law to take hold of grace is a blessed and joyful one.

We therefore, following Paul's example and diligence, work as hard as possible to set out the difference between the law and the Gospel clearly — which is very simple at the level of words. Who cannot see that Hagar is not Sarah and Sarah is not Hagar? That Ishmael is not Isaac and does not have what Isaac has? These distinctions are easy to see. But in the grip of great terror, in the

agony of death, when the conscience is wrestling with the judgment of God — it is the hardest thing in the world to say with steady and confident hope: 'I am not the son of Hagar, but of Sarah. The law has no claim on me. For Sarah is my mother, who gives birth to free children and heirs, not to servants.'

By this testimony from Isaiah, Paul has proven that Sarah — that is, the church — is the true mother who gives birth to free children and heirs. Hagar — that is, the synagogue — produces many children indeed, but they are servants and must be cast out. Moreover, since this passage also speaks of the abolishing of the law and of Christian freedom, it deserves careful attention. Just as it is the chief and central article of Christian teaching to know that we are justified and saved by Christ, so it is also vitally important to understand the teaching about the abolishing of the law. It greatly confirms our teaching about faith and helps us attain solid and certain comfort of conscience when we are assured that the law is abolished — especially in the midst of great terror and serious spiritual conflict.

I have said it before and I say it again — for it cannot be said too often: a Christian who lays hold of Christ's gift through faith has no law. The whole law, with all its terrors and torments, is abolished for him. This passage from Isaiah teaches the same thing, and is therefore remarkably comforting — it calls the barren and forsaken woman to rejoice, the very one who according to the law was worthy only of mockery or pity. For under the law, barrenness was a curse. But the Holy Spirit reverses this verdict and pronounces the barren woman worthy of praise and blessing — while the fruitful, the mother of children, is pronounced accursed. This is the force of: 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break

forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.' However forsaken and barren Sarah — that is, the church — may appear before the world, not possessing the righteousness and works of the law, she is nonetheless a supremely fruitful mother with an infinite number of children before God, as the prophet declares. And however fruitful Hagar may appear, and however many children she may produce, none of them remain. The slave woman's children are cast out of the house together with their mother and do not share in the inheritance with the children of the free woman — as Paul says shortly after.

Since we are children of the free woman, our old husband the law has been abolished (Romans 7). As long as he held dominion over us, it was impossible for us to bring forth children who are free in spirit or who know grace — we remained with the rest in bondage. It is true that while the law reigns, people are not idle. They work hard, they bear the burden and the heat of the day, they bring forth and produce many children. But both fathers and children are illegitimate — they do not belong to the free mother. So they are ultimately cast out of the house and the inheritance with Ishmael. They die and are condemned. It is therefore impossible for people to attain the inheritance — that is, to be justified and saved — through the law, however hard they work or however fruitful they are in it. Cursed therefore be that teaching, life, and religion that seeks to obtain righteousness before God through the law or its works. But let us press on with the subject of the abolishing of the law.

The scholastic theologians, when discussing the abolishing of the law, said that the judicial and ceremonial laws became harmful after Christ's coming and were therefore abolished — but not the moral law. These blind teachers did not know what they were saying. If you are going to speak of the abolishing of the law, speak of the law in its true and proper use and function — as it is understood spiritually — and include the whole law, making no distinction at all between the judicial, ceremonial, and moral law. When Paul says that we are delivered from the curse of the law through Christ, he is speaking of the entire law — and most specifically of the moral law, which alone accuses, curses, and condemns the conscience. The judicial and ceremonial laws do not do this. We therefore say that the moral law — the law of the Ten Commandments — has no power to accuse and terrify the conscience in which Jesus Christ reigns by His grace, for He has destroyed its power.

Not that the conscience does not feel the law's terrors at all — for indeed it does. But those terrors cannot condemn it or bring it to despair. For 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1). And: 'If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36). So even when a Christian is terrified by the law showing him his sin, he does not despair — for he believes in Jesus Christ, and having been baptized into Him and cleansed by His blood, he has forgiveness of all his sins. When our sin is pardoned through Christ — who is the Lord of the law — and pardoned in such a way that He gave Himself for it — the law, which is a servant, has no more power to accuse and condemn us for sin, because the sin has been forgiven and we have been set free. The Son has delivered us from bondage. Therefore the law is completely abolished for those who believe in Christ.

But you may say: I am doing nothing. True — there is nothing you can do to deliver yourself from the tyranny of the law. But hear this joyful news that the Holy Spirit brings to you from the prophet's words: 'Rejoice, you barren one!' It is as if He said: Why are you so downcast, when there is no reason to mourn? 'But I am barren and forsaken.' Even so — however barren and forsaken you may be, however much you lack the righteousness of the law, Christ is your righteousness. He was made a curse for you to deliver you from the curse of the law. If you believe in Him, the law is dead to you. And as much as Christ is greater than the law, that much more excellent is your righteousness compared to the righteousness of the law. Moreover, you are fruitful and not barren — for you have far more children than the woman who has a husband.

There is also another abolishing of the law that is outward: namely, that the civil laws of Moses do not apply to us at all. We should not revive them or superstitiously bind ourselves to them — as some tried to do in the past, not understanding this freedom. Although the Gospel does not make us subject to Moses' civil laws, it does not exempt us from all civil authority. Rather, it makes us subject in this bodily life to the laws of whatever government we live under — commanding everyone to obey their governing authorities and laws, not only out of fear of punishment but as a matter of conscience (1 Peter 2; Romans 13). An emperor or any other ruler would do nothing wrong by adopting some of Moses' civil laws. He could freely do so without sin. The papal scholastics are therefore mistaken when they teach that Moses' civil laws are harmful and deadly since Christ's coming.

Similarly, we are not bound to Moses' ceremonial laws — and still less to the ceremonies of the Pope. But because physical life cannot function without some structure and ceremony — there must be some order and framework — the Gospel permits ordinances to be made in the church concerning days, times, and places, so that people may know when and where to gather to hear the word of God. It also permits that readings and lessons be appointed — as in schools — especially for the instruction of children and those who are new to the faith. These things are permitted so that everything in the church may be done properly and in order (1 Corinthians 14) — not so that those who observe such arrangements gain forgiveness of sins through them. Furthermore, these arrangements may be changed or set aside without sin, provided it is done without causing offense to those who are weaker in faith.

But Paul is speaking here primarily about the abolishing of the moral law — and this deserves careful attention. He argues against the righteousness of the law in order to establish the righteousness of faith, concluding as follows: if grace alone, or faith in Christ alone, justifies, then the whole law is abolished — without any exception. He confirms this with the testimony from Isaiah, which calls the barren and forsaken woman to rejoice. She appears to have no children and no hope of ever having any — that is, she has no disciples, no favor or standing in the world, because she preaches the word of the cross, Christ crucified, against all the wisdom of the flesh. 'But you who are barren,' the prophet says, 'let none of this trouble you — rather, lift up your voice and rejoice! For the desolate one has far more children than the one who has a husband.' That is: the one who is married and has many children will be brought low, and the forsaken one will have many children.

Paul calls the church barren because her children are not born through the law, through works, or through any human effort or industry — they are born through the word of faith, in the Spirit of God. There is nothing but birth — no working at all. The fruitful woman, by contrast, labors and strains with great toil to bear and bring forth children. There everything is working — no birth. But because they are trying to obtain the rights of children and heirs through the righteousness of the law or their own righteousness, they remain servants and never receive the inheritance — however much they wear themselves out with continual effort. For they are working against God's will, trying by their own efforts to obtain what God desires to give freely to all believers for Christ's sake. Believers also do good works — but these do not make them sons and heirs. Their birth into the family already accomplishes that. Rather, having already been made children and heirs, they do good works to glorify God and to help their neighbors.

Verse 28. And you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

That is: we are not children of the flesh, like Ishmael — or like all fleshly Israel, who boasted that they were Abraham's seed and God's people. But Christ answered them (John 8): 'If you were Abraham's children, you would not be seeking to kill Me, who told you the truth.' And: 'If God were your Father, you would love Me and receive My word.' It is as if He said: Brothers who grew up together in one house know each other's voice — but you are of your father the devil. 'We are not such children,' he says, 'as those who remain servants and will ultimately be cast out of the house.' 'We are children of promise, as Isaac was — that is, children of grace and faith, born solely through the promise.' I have covered this

fully in chapter 3 when discussing the passage: 'In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' Therefore we are declared righteous — not by the law, by works, or by our own righteousness, but by the sheer mercy and grace of God. Paul repeats this very often and sets forth the promise received by faith alone with great diligence — for he knew how necessary it was to do so.

That completes the allegory drawn from Genesis, to which Paul attached the passage from Isaiah as an interpretation. Now he applies the history of Ishmael and Isaac as an example and comfort for us.

Verse 29. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is also now.

This passage contains a remarkable consolation. All who are born in Christ, live in Him, and rejoice in their birth and inheritance as children of God will have Ishmael as their enemy and persecutor. We learn this today from experience — we see that the world is filled with turmoil, persecution, sects, and offenses. If we did not arm ourselves with this consolation from Paul and others like it, and did not thoroughly understand the article of justification, we would never be able to stand against the violence and subtle schemes of Satan. For who would not be shaken by the fierce persecution of our opponents, and by the sects and endless offenses stirred up by a swarm of restless and fanatical spirits? It truly grieves us deeply when we are forced to hear that everything was peaceful and quiet before the Gospel came forth — but since it has been preached and published, everything is in chaos and the whole world is in an uproar, with everyone arming himself against everyone else. When a person without the Spirit of God hears this,

he is immediately offended and concludes that disobedience of subjects toward their rulers, uprisings, wars, plagues, famines, the collapse of societies and kingdoms, sects, offenses, and every other evil are all the product of the Gospel's teaching.

Against this powerful offense we must comfort and arm ourselves with this sweet consolation: that believers must bear in this world the name and the title of troublemakers and schismatics, and authors of countless evils. This is why our opponents believe they have a just cause — indeed, that they are doing God high service — when they hate, persecute, and kill us. It cannot be otherwise: Ishmael must persecute Isaac. But Isaac does not persecute Ishmael. Whoever is unwilling to endure Ishmael's persecution should not call himself a Christian.

But let our opponents — who so loudly amplify and magnify these evils today — tell us what good followed the preaching of Christ and His apostles. Did not the destruction of the Jewish kingdom follow? Was not the Roman Empire overthrown? Was not the whole world in turmoil? Yet the Gospel was not the cause of any of this — Christ and His apostles preached it for the benefit and salvation of people, not their destruction. These things followed because of the people themselves — nations, kings, and rulers, possessed by the devil, who refused to hear the word of grace, life, and eternal salvation, but detested and condemned it as a doctrine most harmful to religion and society. That this would happen the Holy Spirit foretold through David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?' (Psalm 2:1).

We hear and see these same upheavals today. Our opponents blame our teaching. But the teaching of grace and peace does not stir up these troubles. It is the peoples, nations, kings, and rulers

of the earth who — as the psalm says — rage, plot, conspire, and make plans, not against us (as they think), not against our teaching that they slander as false and seditious, but against the Lord and His anointed. Therefore all their schemes and plans are and will be frustrated and brought to nothing: 'He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.' Let them shout as long as they like that we are the cause of these upheavals and rebellions. This psalm comforts us by showing that they themselves are the authors of these troubles. They cannot believe this. They certainly cannot believe that they are the ones who rage and rise up and plot against the Lord and His anointed. They think rather that they are defending the Lord's cause, protecting His glory, and doing Him acceptable service by persecuting us. But the psalm does not lie, and the end will make it plain. In all of this we do nothing but suffer — as our conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the teaching for which they stir up all these upheavals and offenses is not ours — it is the teaching of Christ. We cannot deny this teaching or abandon its defense, since Christ says: 'Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'

Whoever will preach Christ faithfully and confess Him as our righteousness must be content to be called a dangerous troublemaker who stirs up everything. 'The men who have turned the world upside down,' the Jews said of Paul and Silas in Acts 17, 'have come here also and they act against the decrees of Caesar.' And in Acts 24: 'We have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world,

and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.' In the same way the Gentiles in Acts 16 complained: 'These men are disturbing our city.' Today they accuse Luther of being a troubler of the papacy and of the Roman Empire. If I kept silent, everything the strong man holds would be at peace, and the Pope would not persecute me anymore. But by my silence the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be dishonored and destroyed. If I speak, the Pope is disturbed and rages cruelly. The choice is: we must lose either the Pope — an earthly and mortal man — or the immortal God, Christ Jesus, life, and eternal salvation. Let the Pope perish then. Let God be exalted. Let Christ reign and triumph forever.

Christ Himself, when He foresaw in spirit the great upheavals that would follow His preaching, comforted Himself this way: 'I came to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!' In the same way, we see today that great troubles follow the preaching of the Gospel — through the persecution and blasphemy of our opponents and the ingratitude of the world. This grieves us so deeply that sometimes, according to the flesh and the judgment of reason, we think it would have been better if the Gospel had never been published, than for such turmoil to have come from its preaching. But according to the Spirit we say boldly with Christ: 'I came to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!' And once that fire is kindled, great upheavals follow immediately. For it is not a king or emperor who has been provoked — it is the god of this world, a most mighty spirit and lord of the entire world. This weak word, preaching Christ crucified, attacks this powerful and terrible enemy. Behemoth, feeling the divine power

of this word, rouses all his members, lashes his tail, and makes the depths of the sea boil like a pot (Job 41). From this come all these upheavals — all the furious and savage raging of the world.

So let it not trouble us that our opponents are offended and cry out that the preaching of the Gospel produces nothing good. They are unbelievers — blind and hardened — and so it is impossible for them to see any fruit of the Gospel. We who believe, by contrast, see its immeasurable benefits and fruits — even though outwardly for a time we are crushed by endless evils, despised, plundered, accused, condemned as the refuse and filth of the world, and killed, and inwardly tormented by the awareness of sin and attacked by demons. For we live in Christ, in whom and through whom we are made kings and lords over sin, death, the flesh, the world, hell, and every evil — in whom and through whom we also trample underfoot that dragon and serpent who is the king of sin and death. How does this happen? By faith. The blessedness we hope for is not yet revealed — but in the meantime we wait for it patiently, and even now already possess it surely through faith.

We should therefore study the article of justification diligently — for it alone can sustain us against all these endless slanders and offenses, and comfort us in all our temptations and persecutions. For we see that it cannot be otherwise: the world will inevitably be offended by the pure teaching of the Gospel, and will continually cry out that no good comes from it — because the natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2). He sees only the outward evils — upheavals, rebellions, murders, sects, and things like these. At these sights he takes offense and is blinded, and at last falls into contempt and blasphemy of God and His word.

We, on the other hand, should draw comfort from this: our opponents do not accuse and condemn us for any obvious evil that we have committed — adultery, murder, theft, or anything like that. They condemn us for our teaching. And what do we teach? That Christ the Son of God has redeemed us from our sins and from eternal death through the death of the cross. So they are not attacking our conduct but our teaching — and not our teaching but Christ's. Therefore if there is any offense, the offense is Christ's, not ours — and the fault for which they persecute us belongs to Christ, not to us. Now, whether they choose to condemn Christ and drag Him down from heaven as a heretic and troublemaker, on the grounds that He is our only justifier and Savior — let them answer for that. As for us, we entrust His cause to Himself and wait quietly to see which side will prevail — Christ or they. After the flesh it grieves us that these Ishmaelites hate and persecute us so fiercely. But according to the Spirit we glory in these afflictions — both because we know we suffer them not for our own sins but for Christ's cause, whose grace and glory we proclaim, and because Paul warned us in advance that Ishmael must mock and persecute Isaac.

The Jews interpret the passage from Genesis 21 that Paul cites — about Ishmael mocking and persecuting Isaac — as meaning that Ishmael forced Isaac to commit idolatry. If he did, I do not believe it was the crude kind of idolatry the Jews imagine — as if Ishmael made clay idols in the Gentile fashion and forced Isaac to worship them. Abraham would never have allowed that. I think rather that Ishmael was outwardly a pious man, as Cain was — who also persecuted his brother and eventually killed him, not for any physical offense but because he saw that God valued his

brother more than him. Similarly, Ishmael was outwardly a devout man who sacrificed and practiced religion. Therefore he mocked his brother Isaac and claimed superiority over him for two reasons: first, his religious practice and worship of God; and second, his civil standing and claim to the inheritance. These were things he believed he had a rightful claim to. He considered the kingship and priesthood to belong to him by divine right as the firstborn — and so he persecuted Isaac spiritually over religion, and physically over the inheritance.

This persecution never leaves the church — especially when the Gospel's teaching is flourishing: the children of the flesh mock and persecute the children of the promise. The papists persecute us today, and for no other reason than that we teach that righteousness comes through the promise. It infuriates them that we will not honor their idols — that is, that we do not put forward their righteousness, their works and forms of worship invented and ordained by men, as effective for obtaining grace and forgiveness of sins. For this reason they work to cast us out of the house — they boast that they are the church, the children and people of God, and that the inheritance belongs to them. On our side, they excommunicate and banish us as heretics and troublemakers — and when they can, they kill us as well — believing they are doing God acceptable service in all of this. In so doing they try to exclude us both from this life and from the life to come. The Anabaptists and similar groups hate us intensely because we challenge and reject the errors and heresies they spread and daily revive in the church. For this reason they regard us as far worse than the papists, and have developed a more savage hatred toward us than they have toward the papists.

As soon as the word of God comes to light, the devil is enraged and uses all his power and cunning to persecute it and destroy it entirely. He therefore cannot help but stir up endless sects, horrible offenses, cruel persecutions, and abominable murders. For he is the father of lies and a murderer. He spreads his lies throughout the world through false teachers, and he kills people through tyrants. By these means he rules both the spiritual and the physical realm: the spiritual kingdom through the lies of false teachers — also stirring up in each of us personally, without ceasing, heresies and wicked thoughts through his fiery arrows — and the physical kingdom through the sword of tyrants. So this father of lies and murder stirs up persecution on every front — both spiritual and physical — against the children of the free woman. The spiritual persecution we are now forced to endure from heretics is the most grievous and intolerable, because of the endless offenses and slanders by which the devil works to discredit our teaching. We are forced to hear that the heresies of the Anabaptists and other heretics — along with every other kind of trouble — spring from our doctrine. The physical persecution, by which tyrants threaten our property and our lives, is more bearable — for they persecute us not for our sins but for the testimony of God's word. Let us therefore learn from the very title Christ gives to the devil — that he is the father of lies and murder (John 8) — that whenever the Gospel flourishes and Christ reigns, sects of destruction must spring up, and murderers persecuting the Gospel must rage everywhere. Paul says plainly: 'There must be heresies.' Whoever does not know this will soon be offended — and falling away from the true God and true faith, will return to a false god and a false faith.

Paul therefore arms believers in advance in this passage so that they will not be scandalized by these persecutions, sects, and offenses, saying: 'But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit' — It is as if he said: if we are children of the promise and born of the Spirit, we must fully expect to be persecuted by our brother born of the flesh — and not only by our enemies who are openly wicked, but also by those who were once our dear friends, whom we knew well and who received the true Gospel from us. These will become our deadly enemies and persecute us savagely. For they are brothers after the flesh, and they must persecute their brothers born of the Spirit. Christ laments the same thing through Psalm 41 about Judas: 'Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.' But our consolation is this: we have given our Ishmaelites no occasion to persecute us. The papists persecute us because we teach the pure and sincere Gospel — if we would abandon it, they would stop. And if we would approve the destructive heresies of the sectarians, they would praise us. But because we reject and abhor the wickedness of both, they hate us bitterly and persecute us without mercy.

And it is not only Paul who arms us against such persecutions and offenses — Christ Himself also gives us the sweetest comfort in John 15: 'If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.' As if He said: I am the reason for all the persecutions you endure. If you are killed, you are killed for My sake. For if you did not preach My word and con-

fess Me, the world would not persecute you. 'But take heart — a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you, for My name's sake.'

With these words Christ places all the fault on Himself and frees us from all fear. It is as if He said: the reason the world hates and persecutes you is not you — it is My name, which you preach and confess, that is the cause. 'But take courage — I have overcome the world.' This comfort holds us firm, so that we have no doubt that Christ is strong enough not only to endure all the cruelty of tyrants and the cunning of heretics, but to conquer them. He demonstrated this power against the Jews and Romans, whose tyranny and persecutions He endured for a time. He also endured the schemes and plots of heretics — but in His time and way He overthrew them all and remained king and conqueror. So let the papists rage as much as they will. Let the sectarians slander and distort the Gospel of Christ as much as they can. Christ will reign eternally and His word will stand forever — long after all His enemies have been brought to nothing. And there is this additional singular consolation: the persecution of Ishmael against Isaac will not go on forever but will last only a little while — and when it is over, the verdict will be pronounced, as follows.

Verse 30. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.'

This word from Sarah was very painful to Abraham. When he heard this verdict, his fatherly love for his son Ishmael — who was of his own flesh — was deeply moved. Scripture plainly witnesses this in Genesis 21: 'And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.' But God confirmed the verdict Sarah had

pronounced, saying to Abraham: 'Do not be distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.'

In this verdict the Ishmaelites hear the sentence pronounced against them — the sentence that overthrows the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and all others who have persecuted the church of Christ. The same sentence will also overthrow the papists and all who trust in their own works — who today boast that they are God's people and the church, who confidently expect to receive the inheritance, and who judge us, who rest on God's promise, not only as barren and forsaken but as heretics cast out of the church, unfit to be sons and heirs. But God overturns their judgment and pronounces this verdict against them: because they are children of the slave woman and persecute the children of the free woman, they will be cast out of the house and will have no inheritance with the children of the promise — to whom alone the inheritance belongs, as children of the free woman. This verdict is sealed and can never be revoked. It will therefore certainly come to pass that our Ishmaelites will lose not only the ecclesiastical and political authority they currently hold, but also eternal life. For Scripture has declared that the children of the slave woman will be cast out of the house — that is, out of the kingdom of grace — for they cannot be heirs alongside the children of the free woman.

Note here that the Holy Spirit refers to the people of the law and works — almost with contempt — as 'the son of the slave woman.' It is as if He said: Why do you boast about the righteousness of the law and works, and why do you glory in being God's people and children on that basis? If you don't know whose children you are, I will tell you. You are born as slaves, born of a slave

woman. And what kind of slaves? Slaves of the law — and therefore slaves of sin, death, and eternal condemnation. A slave is not an heir. A slave is cast out of the house. Therefore the Pope with his whole kingdom, and all others who seek righteousness — regardless of how holy they appear — who hope to obtain grace and salvation by the law, are servants of that slave woman and have no inheritance with the children of the free woman. I am speaking here not of the popes, cardinals, bishops, and monks who were openly wicked — who made their belly their god and committed sins too horrible to name — but of the best of them: those who lived devoutly and who labored hard through their monastic observances to appease God's wrath and merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These hear their verdict pronounced here: the sons of the slave woman will be cast out of the house along with their mother.

Sentences like this, carefully considered, give us certainty about our teaching and confirm us in the righteousness of faith over against the doctrine of works-righteousness that the world embraces and exalts, while condemning and despising the other. This troubles and offends weak consciences. Even when they clearly see the wickedness, execrable immorality, and horrible abominations of the papists, they still find it hard to believe that the entire multitude bearing the name and title of the church is wrong, and that only a few of them hold a sound understanding of the teaching of faith. And if the papacy still had the same outward holiness and austerity of life it had in the time of the ancient fathers — Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and others — when the clergy had not yet earned the reputation for simony, excess wealth, dissolute living, sensuality, sexual immorality, sodomy, and count-

less other abominations, but lived according to the fathers' rules and decrees in outward austerity and celibacy — what would we be able to do against the papacy?

The celibate life that the clergy observed so strictly in the era of the fathers was an impressive thing, and made men appear as virtual angels in the world's eyes — which is why Paul in Colossians 2 calls it the 'religion of angels.' The papists sing of their virgins: 'He lived an angelic life while in the flesh, yet lived contrary to the flesh.' Furthermore, the so-called contemplative life — to which the clergy were then very devoted, completely neglecting civil and family responsibilities — carried a magnificent show of holiness. Therefore, if that outward display and appearance of the old papacy still existed today, our teaching of faith might have made even less headway than it does now — when the old appearance of outward holiness and strict discipline has completely collapsed and nothing remains but a cesspool of every vice and abomination.

But suppose the old discipline and religion of the papacy were still in place. Even so, following Paul's example — who vigorously attacked the false apostles who outwardly appeared to be very devout and holy men — we would still be obligated to fight against the merit-seekers of the papal kingdom and say: 'Although you live a celibate life, wearing your body down with constant labor, walking in the humility and devotion of angels — still you are servants of the law, of sin, and of the devil, and must be cast out of the house. For you seek righteousness and salvation through your works and not through Christ.'

We should therefore focus our attention not so much on the wicked conduct of the papists as on their abominable teaching and hypocrisy — which is what we are primarily fighting against. Let us

therefore suppose that the religion and discipline of the old papacy still flourished today, observed as strictly and rigorously as ever. We would still have to say: 'If this holiness and purity of life is all you have to set against the wrath and judgment of God, you are in truth the sons of the slave woman — and you will be cast out of the kingdom of heaven and condemned.'

Now, they themselves no longer defend their wicked conduct — or rather, the best and soundest of them actively deplore it. What they are fighting to maintain and defend is the doctrine of demons: hypocrisy and the righteousness of works. They cite the authority of councils and the examples of holy fathers, whom they claim as the originators of their holy orders and statutes. So we are fighting not against the obvious wickedness and abominations of the papacy, but against its greatest holiness and its holiest saints — those who believe they lead an angelic life, imagining they keep not only God's commandments but also the counsels of Christ, performing works of supererogation that go beyond what they are even obligated to do. We say this is labor in vain, unless they take hold of that one thing alone which Christ says is truly necessary — and choose the good part with Mary, which will never be taken from them.

Bernard did this — a man so devout, so holy, and so chaste that he deserves commendation and honor above all the rest. When he was once gravely ill with no hope of recovery, he did not put his trust in his celibate life, which he had kept with great purity, nor in his many good works and acts of charity. He pushed all of these far from his sight, and receiving Christ's grace by faith, he said: 'I have lived wickedly. But You, Lord Jesus Christ, possess the kingdom of heaven by a double right: first, because You are the Son of God;

second, because You purchased it through Your death and suffering. The first You keep for Yourself as Your birthright. The second You give to me — not by the right of my works, but by the right of grace.' He did not set his monastic life or his angelic conduct against the wrath of God. He took hold of the one thing necessary — and was saved. I believe Jerome, Gregory, and many other fathers were saved in the same way. And there is no doubt that in the Old Testament many kings of Israel and other idolaters were saved similarly — men who at the hour of death, throwing aside their vain trust in idols, took hold of God's promise made to the seed of Abraham — that is, Christ, in whom all nations would be blessed. And if any papists are saved, they will be saved not by leaning on their own good deeds and merit, but by leaning simply on God's mercy offered to us in Christ, and saying with Paul: 'I no longer have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ' (Philippians 3:9).

Verse 31. So, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

Paul here concludes his allegory of the barren church and the fruitful people of the law. 'We are not children of the slave woman,' he says — meaning we are not under the law that produces bondage, that terrifies, accuses, and drives to despair. We have been delivered from it by Christ, and so it cannot terrify or condemn us. This is something we have already covered thoroughly. And even though the sons of the slave woman persecute us for a time, our comfort is this: they will in the end be compelled to give up the inheritance to us — to those who are the sons of the free woman — and will at last be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:30).

Paul therefore used these words — 'slave woman' and 'free woman' — as an occasion to reject the righteousness of the law and to confirm the teaching of justification. He deliberately seizes on the word 'free woman,' pressing it hard and drawing out all its force — especially at the opening of the next chapter. From it he takes the opportunity to argue for Christian freedom, the knowledge of which is vitally important. The Pope has very nearly destroyed it, subjecting the church to human traditions and ceremonies and to the most miserable and degrading kind of bondage. The freedom purchased by Christ is for us today a powerful fortress — the stronghold by which we defend ourselves against the tyranny of the Pope. We must therefore carefully consider this teaching of Christian freedom — both to confirm the teaching of justification and to raise up and comfort weak consciences against all the troubles and offenses our opponents charge against the Gospel. Christian freedom is a deeply spiritual thing that the fleshly person cannot understand. Even those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, and can speak well of it, find it very hard to hold onto it in their hearts. To reason, it seems like a small matter. If the Holy Spirit does not magnify it and give it weight (Romans 9:23), it will be despised.

The Fifth Chapter

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As Paul approaches the end of his letter, he mounts a vigorous defense of the doctrine of faith and Christian liberty, hurling thundering words against the false apostles — the enemies and destroyers of it — aiming to defeat and silence them. He urges the Galatians to flee their poisonous teaching as they would flee a deadly plague. In doing so, he mingles warnings and promises, doing everything he can to keep them in the liberty Christ has purchased for them.

Verse 1. Stand firm, then, in the freedom with which Christ has set us free.

In other words: hold your ground. Peter says the same: 'Be sober and watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.' Don't be careless — be steadfast and constant. Don't lie down and sleep. Stand up. It matters that you stay alert and hold fast to the liberty Christ has won for you. Those who grow complacent and careless cannot keep this liberty. For Satan despises the light of the Gospel — the doctrine of grace, liberty, comfort, and life — with the deepest hatred. The moment it begins to shine, he fights against it with everything he has, stirring up

storms and obstacles to block its progress and bring it down. Paul therefore warns believers not to sleep or be negligent, but to resist Satan steadily and boldly, so that he cannot rob them of the liberty Christ has purchased for them.

Every word here carries weight. 'Stand,' he says — as if to say: this requires great diligence and vigilance. 'In that liberty' — but what liberty? Not the kind the Emperor grants, but the kind Christ grants. The Emperor gave — or rather was forced to give — the Bishop of Rome a free city and other lands, along with exemptions, privileges, and special rights. That is also a kind of liberty, but it is civil liberty, the kind that exempts the Pope and his clergy from public obligations. Then there is another liberty — a fleshly and in fact devilish liberty — the kind the devil most actively promotes throughout the world. Those who live by this liberty answer to neither God nor law; they simply do as they please. This is the liberty people pursue and embrace today, and it is the liberty the sectarians want — freedom from all correction in their opinions and actions, so they can teach and do whatever they dream up without anyone challenging them. They stand in the liberty the devil has given them. But that is not the liberty we are talking about here — even though the whole world seeks no other. Nor are we speaking of civil liberty. We speak of a very different kind of liberty, one the devil hates and fights against with all his power.

This is the liberty Christ has won for us — not freedom from earthly slavery, nor from Babylonian captivity, nor from the tyranny of the Turks, but from God's eternal wrath. And where does this freedom take effect? In the conscience. There is where our liberty rests, and it extends no further. Christ has made us free — not in a civil or physical sense, but in a divine sense: our con-

science is now free and at peace, no longer fearing the wrath of God to come. This is the true and immeasurable liberty, and if you compare any other kind of liberty to it, the others are like a single drop of water beside the whole ocean. Who can fully express what it means for a person to be assured in his heart that God is not and will never be angry with him, but will be his merciful and loving Father forever — for Christ's sake? This is a marvelous and incomprehensible liberty: that the supreme and almighty Majesty is so favorable toward us that He not only defends, sustains, and helps us in this life, but will also raise our bodies — sown in corruption, dishonor, and weakness — to rise again in incorruption, glory, and power. This is therefore an immeasurable liberty: to be freed from God's wrath forever — a freedom greater than heaven and earth and all creation.

From this liberty flows another: through Christ we are also freed from the law, sin, death, the power of the devil, hell, and everything like these. Just as God's wrath cannot terrify us because Christ has delivered us from it, so the law, sin, and death cannot accuse and condemn us. And even when the law does accuse us and sin does alarm us, they cannot drive us to despair. For faith — which overcomes the world — immediately says: these things have no claim on me, because Christ has set me free and delivered me from all of them. Likewise, death — the most powerful and terrifying force in all the world — is completely conquered in the conscience by this spiritual liberty. The greatness of this Christian liberty must therefore be highly valued and carefully considered. It is easy enough to say the words — freedom from God's wrath, from

sin, from death — but actually applying them to yourself and experiencing their power in the time of temptation is harder than words can express.

Our conscience must therefore be trained and prepared in advance, so that when we feel the accusation of the law, the terrors of sin, the horror of death, and the wrath of God, we can push these dark and frightening images out of our minds and set in their place the liberty Christ has purchased — the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and God's everlasting mercy. Even when the opposing feeling is very strong, we must assure ourselves that it will not last — as the prophet says: 'For a brief moment, in my anger, I hid My face from you — but with everlasting mercy I have compassion on you.' This is very difficult to do. The liberty Christ has purchased for us is not believed as easily as it is named. But if it could be grasped with a sure and steady faith, then no force of terror — whether from the law, sin, death, or the devil — could be so great that it would not be swallowed up instantly, just as a tiny drop of water is swallowed by the sea. And indeed, this Christian liberty swallows up and completely removes the whole mass of evils — the law, sin, death, God's wrath, and in the end the serpent himself, with his head and all his power — and in their place sets righteousness, peace, and eternal life. But blessed is the one who understands and believes this.

Let us learn, then, to value highly this liberty purchased for us by Jesus Christ the Son of God — the one through whom all things in heaven and earth were created. He purchased this liberty at no lesser price than His own blood, to deliver us not from any physical or earthly slavery, but from a spiritual and eternal bondage under mighty and unconquerable tyrants — the law, sin, death, and

the devil — and so to reconcile us to God His Father. Now that these enemies have been defeated and we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, we can be certain that we stand righteous before God and that everything we do pleases Him. And although some remnants of sin still remain in us, they are not counted against us but are pardoned for Christ's sake.

Paul's words here carry great force. 'Stand,' he says, 'in that liberty in which Christ has made you free.' This liberty is not given to us by the law or earned by our righteousness — it is given freely, for Christ's sake. Paul makes this plain throughout the entire letter. Christ also says in John 8: 'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.' He alone stands between us and the evils that trouble and afflict us — He has conquered them and stripped them of their power, so that they can no longer oppress or condemn us. In place of sin and death He gives us righteousness and eternal life, and in this way He transforms the bondage and terror of the law into the liberty of conscience and the comfort of the Gospel, which says: 'Take courage, My son — your sins are forgiven.' Whoever believes in Christ the Son of God has this liberty.

Reason cannot grasp how great this gift truly is, but when a person considers it in the Spirit, he sees that it is beyond all measure. Who can even imagine how great and unspeakable a gift it is — to receive forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life in place of the law, sin, death, and God's wrath, and to have God Himself as a gracious and merciful Father forever? The papists and the hypocrites who seek righteousness through the law or through their own efforts boast that they too have forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and God's favor. They claim to possess this liberty and promise it to others — but in reality they are servants of cor-

ruption, and in the time of temptation their false confidence vanishes in an instant. They are trusting in human works and satisfactions, not in the word of God or in Christ. It is therefore impossible for those who seek to win heaven, life, and salvation by works and merits to ever truly know what liberty and deliverance from sin means.

Our liberty, by contrast, has Christ Himself as its foundation — the eternal high priest who sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Therefore the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and liberty we have through Him is sure, certain, and permanent — as long as we believe it. If we hold to Christ with a steady faith and stand firm in the liberty He has given us, we will possess these immeasurable gifts. But if we become careless and indifferent, we will lose them. Paul's call to watch and stand firm is not without reason — he knew that the devil desires nothing more than to strip us of this liberty, which cost Christ so great a price, and through his servants to entangle us once more in the yoke of bondage, as follows.

Verse 1. Do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul has spoken with profound power about grace and Christian liberty, and with strong and weighty words he has urged the Galatians to remain in it — for it is easily lost. He therefore tells them to stand firm, lest through carelessness or overconfidence they fall back from grace and faith into the law and works. Now, because reason sees no danger in preferring the righteousness of the law over the righteousness of faith, Paul speaks against the law with a kind of holy indignation, calling it with great contempt a yoke — and a yoke of bondage at that. Peter uses the same language in Acts 15: 'Why are you putting God to the test by plac-

ing on the disciples' necks a yoke that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?' And so Paul turns everything around. The false apostles had belittled the promise and exalted the law and its works, saying: 'If you want to be freed from sin and death and to obtain righteousness and life, keep the law — be circumcised, observe special days and months and seasons and years, offer sacrifices, and do things like these. Then your obedience to the law will justify and save you.' But Paul says exactly the opposite. Those who teach the law in that way, he says, do not set people's consciences free — they snare and trap them with a yoke, and a yoke of bondage at that.

Paul therefore speaks of the law in the lowest and most contemptuous terms, calling it a harsh bondage and a servile yoke — and not without good reason. The dangerous opinion that the law justifies and makes people righteous before God is deeply rooted in human reason, and all of humanity is so wrapped up in it that it can barely escape. Paul seems to be comparing those who seek righteousness by the law to oxen yoked for labor — intending to strip the law of any claim to justify or make righteous. Just as oxen straining under the yoke with great effort receive nothing for their work except fodder, and when they can no longer pull are sent to slaughter — so those who seek righteousness by the law are captive and crushed under the yoke of bondage, the law. After exhausting themselves for a long time in hard, grinding labor, their final reward is to remain miserable and permanent servants. Servants of what? Of sin, death, God's wrath, and the devil. There is therefore no greater or harder bondage than the bondage of the law — which is exactly why Paul calls it the yoke of bondage. For as we have said many times: the law only reveals, increases, and magnifies sin, ac-

cuses, terrifies, condemns, generates wrath, and in the end drives poor consciences to despair — which is the most miserable and crushing bondage there is (Romans 3:4-5).

Paul therefore uses very forceful language. He desperately wants to persuade the Galatians not to let the false apostles lay this unbearable burden on their shoulders, or to be tangled again in the yoke of bondage. It is as if he is saying: what is at stake here is not a trivial matter — it is either eternal liberty or eternal bondage. Just as freedom from God's wrath and all evils is not temporary or physical but eternal, so the bondage of sin, death, the devil, and damnation — which burdens everyone who tries to be made righteous and saved by the law — is not a temporary physical bondage but an eternal one. Those who push themselves to fulfill the law precisely and completely (and it is these people Paul is speaking about) can never find rest and peace of conscience in this life. They constantly doubt whether God is pleased with them, they live in perpetual fear of death and the wrath and judgment of God — and after this life they will be punished for their unbelief with eternal damnation.

Those who depend entirely on the law and its works for righteousness are rightly called the devil's martyrs. According to the proverb, they endure more suffering and self-punishment to earn hell than Christ's martyrs endure to obtain heaven. They are tormented in two ways. First, they afflict themselves miserably throughout their lives with many hard and demanding works — all for nothing. Then at death they receive as their reward eternal damnation. They are the most miserable martyrs of all — both in this life and in the next — and their bondage is eternal. The godly, by contrast, have troubles in this world, but in Christ they have

peace, because they believe He has overcome the world. We must therefore stand firm in the freedom Christ purchased for us by His death, and guard carefully against being entangled again in the yoke of bondage — as happens today to the fanatical spirits who, falling away from faith and from this freedom, have brought on themselves a temporary bondage in this life and will face an eternal bondage in the life to come. As for the papists, most of them have become outright Epicureans — so while they can, they indulge the freedom of the flesh, singing that careless song: 'Eat, drink, and be merry — after death there is no more pleasure.' But they are the devil's slaves, held captive at his will and pleasure, and they will feel that eternal bondage in hell. Paul's exhortation up to this point has been intense and earnest — but what follows goes even further.

Verse 2. Look! I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Here Paul, powerfully stirred by zeal and spiritual intensity, thunders against the law and circumcision. These thundering words, driven by deep zeal and indignation, are drawn out of him by the Holy Spirit: 'Look — I, Paul,' he says. I — who know I have received the Gospel not from any man but by the revelation of Jesus Christ, and who have been given authority from above to teach and declare — I tell you: if you receive circumcision, Christ will benefit you absolutely nothing. This is a very hard sentence. Paul is declaring that to be circumcised is effectively to make Christ useless — not in regard to Christ Himself, but in regard to the Galatians, who had been deceived by the false apostles into believing that faith in Christ was not enough, that circumcision was also required for salvation.

This passage serves as a touchstone by which we can judge with complete certainty all doctrines, works, religions, and ceremonies — whoever teaches them. Whoever teaches that anything other than faith in Christ is necessary for salvation — whether papists, Turks, Jews, or sectarians — or devises any work, religious practice, rule, tradition, or ceremony with the belief that through such things one can obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life — these people hear in this passage the judgment of the Holy Spirit pronounced against them through the apostle: Christ benefits them nothing. Since Paul dared pronounce this verdict against the law and circumcision, both of which were ordained by God Himself, what would he have said against the worthless scraps of human tradition?

This passage therefore falls like a thunderbolt on the entire papal kingdom. All the priests, monks, and hermits living in their monasteries — and I am speaking of the best of them — placed all their trust and confidence in their own works, righteousness, vows, and merits rather than in Christ. They wickedly and blasphemously imagined Christ to be an angry judge, an accuser, a condemner — and so here they hear their verdict: Christ benefits them nothing. For if they can put away their sins and earn forgiveness of sins and eternal life through their own righteousness and strict manner of life, then what was the point of Christ's birth? What benefit do they receive from His death and bloodshed, His resurrection, His victory over sin, death, and the devil — if they are able to conquer these enemies by their own strength? And what tongue can express, or what heart can conceive, how terrible a thing it is to make Christ useless? The apostle therefore hurls these words with

sharp displeasure and indignation: 'If you receive circumcision, Christ will benefit you nothing' — meaning: none of His benefits will come to you. He will have given them all to you for nothing.

This makes it plain enough that nothing under the sun is more harmful than the doctrine of human traditions and works, for it completely abolishes and overturns the truth of the Gospel, faith, true worship of God, and Christ Himself — in whom the Father has established everything (Colossians 2). In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). Therefore all who are authors or defenders of the doctrine of works are suppressors of the Gospel — they make Christ's death and victory worthless, they disfigure and destroy His sacraments, stripping them of their true purpose, and in short they are blasphemers, enemies, and deniers of God and all His promises and gifts. Whoever is not moved by Paul's words — calling the law a yoke of bondage and declaring that those who require circumcision for salvation make Christ worthless — whoever cannot be turned away from the law and circumcision, nor shaken loose from trust in his own righteousness and works, nor stirred to seek the liberty that is in Christ — that person's heart is harder than stone and iron.

This is therefore a clear and certain verdict: Christ is useless — that is, His birth, crucifixion, and resurrection profit nothing — to the one who is circumcised in the sense of putting his trust in circumcision. Paul is not speaking here, as I have said before, of the physical act of circumcision (which does no harm to the person who places no confidence in it for righteousness), but of the use that is made of the act — that is, the trust and righteousness attached to it. We must read Paul in light of the subject he is ad-

dressing, which is this: people are not justified by the law, by works, by circumcision, or by anything like these. He is not saying works are nothing in themselves, but that trust in works and righteousness based on works are nothing — because that is what makes Christ useless. Therefore, whoever receives circumcision with the belief that it is necessary for justification — Christ avails him nothing.

We must keep this firmly in mind in our private temptations, when the devil accuses and terrifies our conscience in order to drive it to despair. He is the father of lies and the enemy of Christian liberty — so he torments us constantly with false fears, hoping that when our conscience has lost its Christian liberty, it will feel the grip of sin and condemnation and remain permanently in anguish and terror. When that great dragon — that ancient serpent, the devil, who deceives the whole world and accuses our brothers before God day and night (Revelation 12) — comes and charges you with having done no good and having broken God's law, say to him: You are reminding me of my past sins and telling me I have done nothing right. But none of that touches me — because if I were trusting in my good deeds, or despairing because I have none, Christ would profit me nothing either way. So whether you throw my sins at me or my good works, I don't care — I set both far out of my sight and rest only in the liberty Christ has given me. I know He profits me, and I will not make Him useless — which I would do if I either presumed to earn God's favor and eternal life by my good deeds, or despaired of my salvation because of my sins.

Let us therefore learn with great care to separate Christ from all works — good as well as evil — from all laws both human and divine, and from all troubled consciences. He does deal with afflicted consciences — but not to afflict them further, but to lift them up and comfort them in their affliction. Therefore, if Christ appears in the form of an angry judge or a lawgiver demanding a strict accounting of our past life, let us be certain that what appears is not Christ but a raging demon. Scripture portrays Christ as our reconciler, our advocate, and our comforter. That is what He is and always will be — He cannot be other than Himself.

So whenever the devil, disguising himself as Christ, argues with us like this — 'My word warned you to do this, and you did not do it. You did this other thing you should not have done. Therefore I will take vengeance on you' — let none of this move us at all. Instead, let us immediately think to ourselves: this is not how Christ speaks to poor, afflicted, and despairing consciences. He does not heap more suffering on the already burdened. He does not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering wick. He speaks sharply to the hardened, yes — but to those who are terrified and crushed, He draws them to Himself with the most gentle and comforting words: 'Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' 'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' 'Take courage, My son — your sins are forgiven.' 'Do not be afraid — I have overcome the world.' 'The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.' We must be on our guard, therefore, against being deceived by Satan's marvelous tricks and endless subtleties — mistaking an accuser and condemner for a comforter and Savior, so that under the mask of a false Christ (that is, the devil), we lose the true Christ and make

Him useless to us. This is what we have to say about private and personal temptations, and how we should conduct ourselves in them.

Verse 3. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

The first problem is severe enough — that Christ profits nothing to those who are circumcised — but what follows is no less serious: that those who receive circumcision are obligated to keep the entire law. Paul says this with such earnestness that he confirms it with an oath: 'I testify' — that is, I swear by the living God. These words can be understood in two ways — negatively and positively. Taking them negatively: I testify to every man who receives circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law — meaning, he fulfills none of it. In the very act of circumcision he is not truly circumcised, and in attempting to fulfill the law he does not fulfill it but rather transgresses it. This seems to me to be the plain and true meaning of Paul here. Later in chapter 6 he explains himself: 'Even those who are circumcised do not keep the law themselves.' He says the same earlier in chapter 3: 'All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.' As if to say: even though you are circumcised, you are not thereby righteous or free from the law — instead, by that very act you become more indebted and enslaved to it. The harder you try to satisfy the law and be released from it, the more deeply you trap yourself under its yoke, giving it more power to accuse and condemn you. This is going backward like a crab — trying to wash away filth with more filth.

What I am saying here in connection with Paul's words I have learned both from my own experience and from observing others. I have seen many people who labored painfully and in all sincerity

did everything within their power — fasting, praying, wearing hair shirts, punishing and tormenting their bodies with various disciplines (practices that would eventually have destroyed even a body made of iron) — all in order to find quietness and peace of conscience. And yet the more they labored, the more they were crushed with fear. Especially when death drew near, they became so terrified that I have seen convicted murderers and other criminals face death more courageously than these people did — people who had nonetheless lived very holy lives.

It is therefore entirely true that those who do the law do not do it — for the more they try to fulfill it, the more they transgress it. We can say the same about human traditions: the more a person strives to quiet his conscience through them, the more he disturbs and torments it. When I was a monk, I tried with everything I had to live according to the strict rule of my order. I was in the habit of going to confession with great devotion, carefully listing all my sins — always with deep sorrow and contrition — and I returned to confession frequently, faithfully performing the penance assigned to me. Yet even so, my conscience could never be fully settled. It was always in doubt, always saying: you did not do this correctly; you were not contrite and sorrowful enough; you left out that sin in your confession. The more I tried to heal my weak, wavering, and troubled conscience through human traditions, the weaker, more uncertain, and more afflicted I became. And so, the more I followed human traditions, the more I violated them — and in seeking righteousness through my monastic order, I could never reach it. For it is impossible, as Paul says, for the conscience to be settled by the works of the law — and far less by human traditions — without the promise and the good news concerning Christ.

Those who seek to be justified and made alive by the law are actually much further from righteousness and life than tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes. These latter people cannot place their trust in their own works, because their works are the kind for which they cannot hope to earn grace and forgiveness of sins. After all, if righteousness and works done according to the law do not justify, how could sins committed against the law possibly justify? In this sense, sinners and tax collectors are in far better standing than those who pursue righteousness through works — because they have no confidence in their own works, and that kind of confidence is what most powerfully blocks true faith in Christ, when it does not kill it altogether. Those who pursue righteousness through works, on the other hand, outwardly avoid sin and live blamelessly in the world's eyes — and because of this they cannot escape a sense of their own righteousness, which is incompatible with true faith in Christ. This makes them more miserable than tax collectors and prostitutes. The sinners offer God no good works and demand no eternal reward for them — as the self-righteous do — because they have no such works to offer. Instead, they simply ask that their sins be forgiven for Christ's sake.

The other interpretation is positive: whoever is circumcised is also obligated to keep the entire law. For whoever accepts Moses in one point must of necessity accept him in all points. It does no good to say that circumcision is required but the rest of Moses's laws are not. By the same logic that binds you to circumcision, you are also bound to the whole law. Now, to be obligated to keep the entire law is nothing other than to show in effect that Christ has not yet come. If that is true, then we are obligated to keep all the Jewish ceremonies and laws concerning foods, places, and times —

and we are still waiting for Christ to come, abolish the Jewish kingdom and priesthood, and establish a new kingdom throughout the world. But all of Scripture bears witness, and everything that followed plainly demonstrates, that Christ has already come — that through His death He has redeemed humanity, abolished the law, and fulfilled everything the prophets foretold about Him. Therefore, since the law has been completely abolished and set aside, He has given us grace and truth. It is not the law or its works, but faith in Jesus Christ, that makes a person righteous.

Some today would bind us to certain laws of Moses — whichever ones they happen to prefer — just as the false apostles tried to do in their time. This must not be permitted in any way. For if we allow Moses to rule over us in any one thing, we become obligated to obey him in everything. We therefore will not be burdened with any law of Moses. We are glad to read him and hear him as a prophet and witness to Christ, and to draw from him good examples of wise laws and upright conduct. But we will not allow him to have any authority over our conscience. In that regard, let him be dead and buried — with no one knowing where his grave is.

The first interpretation — the negative one — seems to me more fitting and more spiritually penetrating, though both are valid and both condemn the righteousness of the law. The first says: we are so far from obtaining righteousness through the law that the more we try to fulfill it, the more we transgress it. The second says: whoever wants to keep any part of the law is obligated to keep the whole law. Both lead to the same conclusion: Christ profits nothing to those who seek to be justified by the law.

What this makes plain is that Paul means nothing other than this: the law is a direct denial of Christ. It is a remarkable thing that Paul dares to say this — that the law of Moses, given by God to the people of Israel, is a denial of Christ. Why then did God give it? Before Christ came and appeared in the flesh, the law was necessary — for the law is our guardian to bring us to Christ. But now that Christ has been revealed and we believe in Him, we are no longer under that guardian. We covered this extensively at the end of chapter 3. Whoever teaches, then, that the law is necessary for righteousness teaches a plain denial of Christ and all His benefits — and makes God a liar, and even makes the law itself a liar. For the law itself bears witness to Christ and to the promises made concerning Him, and foretold that He would be a King of grace, not of the law.

Verse 4. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law — you have fallen from grace.

Here Paul explains himself and makes clear that he is not speaking simply about the law or the act of circumcision, but about the confidence and belief that one can be justified by them. It is as if he were saying: I do not condemn the law or circumcision outright — it is lawful for me to eat and drink and associate with Jews according to the law; it was lawful for me to circumcise Timothy. But to seek to be justified by the law, as though Christ had not yet come, or as though His presence alone were not sufficient to justify — that is what I condemn, for that is what it means to be cut off from Christ. Therefore, he says, 'you have been severed' — meaning you are completely empty of Christ. Christ is not in you, He does not work in you any longer. You have no share in His knowl-

edge, His Spirit, His fellowship, His favor, His liberty, His life, or His work — you are completely separated from Him, so that He has nothing more to do with you, nor you with Him.

Paul's words here deserve careful attention: to seek righteousness by the law is nothing other than to be cut off from Christ and to make Him completely useless. What could be said more powerfully against the law? What argument can stand against a thunderbolt like this? It is impossible for Christ and the law to dwell together in one heart — either the law must yield, or Christ must. If you think Christ and the law can coexist in you, you can be sure it is not Christ who dwells in your heart but the devil in Christ's likeness — accusing and terrifying you, and demanding strict compliance with the law and its works. The true Christ, as I said before, does not call you to account for your sins, nor tell you to trust in your own good works. True knowledge of Christ — genuine faith — does not argue about whether your good works earn righteousness or your evil works earn condemnation. It simply concludes: if you have done good works, you are not thereby justified; if you have done evil works, you are not thereby condemned. I am not denying praise to good works, nor am I commending evil ones. But in the matter of justification, I say we must look to how we hold onto Christ — because if we seek to be justified by the law, we make Him useless to us. Christ alone justifies me — both over against my evil deeds and apart from my good deeds. If I hold this conviction about Christ, I have grasped the true Christ. But if I think He requires the law and works from me for salvation, He becomes useless to me, and I am completely cut off from Him.

These are terrifying declarations and warnings against the righteousness of the law and human self-righteousness. Yet they are also the most certain foundational truths that confirm the article of justification. The conclusion is final: you must give up either Christ or the righteousness of the law. If you keep Christ, you are righteous before God. But if you cling to the law, Christ benefits you nothing — you become obligated to keep the entire law, and the sentence has already been pronounced against you: 'Cursed is everyone who does not do everything written in this law.' What we say of the law we say equally of human traditions. Either the Pope and all his religious systems must abandon everything in which they have trusted until now, or Christ will profit them nothing. This shows us clearly how deadly and destructive the papal doctrine has been. It has led people completely away from Christ and made Him worthless to them. God complains in Jeremiah 23 that the prophets prophesied lies and the dreams of their own hearts, so that His people would forget His name. In the same way, the false prophets abandoned the true interpretation of the law and the genuine teaching about the seed of Abraham in whom all nations would be blessed — and preached their own inventions instead, causing the people to forget their God. So the papists darkened and buried the doctrine of Christ until it had no effect, teaching nothing but the doctrine of works and drawing the whole world away from Christ. Whoever considers this seriously will feel his heart tremble.

Verse 4. You have fallen from grace.

That is to say: you are no longer in the kingdom of grace. Just as a person on a ship who falls overboard on either side is drowned, so anyone who has fallen from grace must perish.

Whoever seeks to be justified by the law has fallen into the sea and thrown himself into danger of eternal death. Now if those who seek to be justified by the moral law fall from grace, where do those fall who seek to be justified by their own human traditions and vows? To the very bottom of hell. Though of course they themselves taught it differently — they flew up to heaven! 'Whoever lives according to the rule of Saint Francis, Dominic, Benedict, or such others,' they said, 'the peace and mercy of God rests upon them.' And again: 'All who observe and keep chastity, obedience, and so on, will have eternal life.' But let all that nonsense go back to the devil, from whom it came — and listen instead to what Paul teaches here, and what Christ teaches: 'Whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life; but whoever does not believe in the Son will not see life — the wrath of God remains on him.' And again: 'Whoever does not believe is condemned already.'

Now, just as the entire papal doctrine concerning human traditions, works, vows, and merits was once the most widespread teaching in the world, it was also considered the best and most reliable of all — and through it the devil established and strengthened his kingdom most powerfully. So when we today attack and overthrow this doctrine through the power of God's word, driving it away like chaff before the wind, it is no wonder that Satan rages so savagely against us, stirs up slander and controversy everywhere, and turns the whole world against us. Someone will say: 'It would have been better to stay silent — none of these troubles would have come.' But we must care more about God's honor, whose glory we proclaim, than about the world's tyranny, which persecutes us. What is the Pope and all the world compared to

God? We are weak, and we carry a heavenly treasure in fragile earthly vessels — but however fragile the vessels, the treasure is beyond all price.

The words 'you have fallen from grace' must not be treated lightly or passed over quickly — they are weighty and of enormous importance. Whoever falls from grace completely loses the atonement, the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness, liberty, and life that Jesus Christ has won for us by His death and resurrection — and in their place acquires God's wrath and judgment, sin, death, the devil's bondage, and eternal damnation. This passage powerfully confirms and defends our doctrine of faith and the article of justification, and it gives us wonderful comfort against the fierce rage of the papists who persecute and condemn us as heretics for teaching it. Indeed, this passage ought to make the enemies of faith and grace — all who seek righteousness through works — afraid to persecute and blaspheme the word of grace, life, and eternal salvation. But they are so hard-hearted and stubborn that they see without seeing and hear without hearing — and when they read this dreadful verdict of the apostle pronounced against them, they do not understand it. Let us therefore leave them alone — they are blind, and they lead the blind.

Verse 5. For we, through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Paul here brings the argument to a close with a notable conclusion: You seek to be justified by the law, by circumcision, by works — but we do not seek justification by those means, so that Christ will not be made useless to us and we will not become obligated to keep the entire law and ultimately fall away from grace. Instead, we wait through the Spirit, by faith, for the hope of righteousness.

Every word here deserves careful attention — they are compact and full of force. Paul does not only say, as he often does, 'we are justified by faith' or 'through the Spirit by faith' — he adds 'we wait for the hope of righteousness,' including hope as well, so that he captures the full scope of faith.

In Scripture, the word 'hope' is used in two ways: for the thing hoped for, and for the inner disposition of the one who hopes. As the thing hoped for, it is used in Colossians 1: 'For the hope laid up for you in heaven' — meaning the actual thing you are hoping for. As the inner disposition of the one who hopes, it is used in Romans 8:24: 'For we are saved by hope.' The word 'hope' in this verse can therefore be taken in either sense, yielding two related meanings. The first: we wait through the Spirit, by faith, for the hope of righteousness — that is, for the righteousness that is hoped for, which will certainly be revealed at the time the Lord chooses to give it. The second: we wait through the Spirit, by faith, for righteousness with hope and longing — meaning we are righteous, but our righteousness has not yet been fully revealed; it still rests in hope. As long as we live in this world, sin remains in our flesh — there is a law in our bodies and members that wages war against the law of our mind and takes us captive to sin (Romans 7:15-17; Romans 7:23). When these impulses of the flesh surge and rule, and we on the other side wrestle against them through the Spirit, that is precisely where hope lives. We have indeed begun to be justified through faith — we have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, and the putting to death of the flesh has begun in us — but we are not yet perfectly righteous. What remains is that we be perfectly justified, and that is what we hope for. Our righteousness, then, is not yet in full possession — it rests under hope.

This is a sweet and solid comfort by which afflicted and troubled consciences — those who feel their sin and are struck by every fiery arrow of the devil — can be wonderfully sustained. The felt weight of sin, God's wrath, death, hell, and every other terror is overwhelmingly powerful in a battle of conscience, as I know from my own experience. In that hour, this is what must be said to the poor afflicted soul: Brother, you want to feel your justification the way you feel your sin — you want the same clear, immediate sense of God's favor that you have of your guilt. But that is not how it works. Your righteousness must rise above all feeling of sin. That is, the justification you hold to does not rest on what you feel, but on your hope that it will be revealed when the Lord is pleased to reveal it. Therefore you must not judge by the feeling of sin that troubles and terrifies you, but by the promise and teaching of faith — by which Christ is promised to you as your perfect and eternal righteousness. In this way, hope in the afflicted — arising from an inward longing — is awakened by faith in the midst of all terrors and felt sin, to hope that he is righteous. And if hope here is taken to mean the thing hoped for, the sense is this: what a person cannot yet see, he trusts will in time be made perfect and fully revealed.

Either meaning stands well, but the first — concerning the inward longing and disposition of hope — brings the richer comfort. My righteousness is not yet complete and cannot yet be felt — and yet I do not despair. Faith holds Christ before me, in whom I trust, and when I have grasped Him by faith, I resist the fiery arrows of the devil and take courage through hope against the feeling of sin, assuring myself that a perfect righteousness is being prepared for me in heaven. Both things are therefore true: I am already made

righteous by the righteousness that has begun in me, and I am also sustained by that same hope against sin, waiting for the full completion of perfect righteousness in heaven. These things are not truly understood until they are put into practice.

What Difference There Is Between Faith and Hope

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A question arises here: what is the difference between faith and hope? The scholastic theologians spent great effort on this question but never arrived at a clear answer. Even for us who labor carefully and with greater fullness of Spirit in the holy Scriptures — without any boasting — it is difficult to find a clear distinction. The relationship between faith and hope is so close that the two cannot be separated from each other. Yet there is a difference between them, which can be drawn from their different functions, their different ways of working, and their different aims.

First, they differ in their subject — the ground in which each rests. Faith rests in the understanding; hope rests in the will. In reality, however, they cannot be separated — each has regard to the other, like the two cherubim of the mercy seat, which could never be divided from each other.

Second, they differ in their function — the way each works. Faith tells us what is to be done; it teaches, prescribes, and directs — it is a form of knowledge. Hope is more like an exhortation — it

stirs up the mind to be strong, bold, and courageous, to endure adversity, and to wait for better things even in the middle of hardship.

Third, they differ in their object — the specific focus of each. Faith has truth as its object; it teaches us to hold firmly to the word and promise concerning the thing that is promised. Hope has God's goodness as its object; it looks to the thing itself that is promised in the word — to those things which faith has taught us to hope for.

Fourth, they differ in order: faith is the beginning of life before all tribulation (Hebrews 11), while hope comes afterward, proceeding out of tribulations (Romans 5).

Fifth, they differ in how they work. Faith is a teacher and a judge — it fights against errors and heresies, testing spirits and doctrines. Hope is something like the commanding general in battle — it fights against tribulation, the cross, impatience, heaviness of spirit, weakness, despair, and blasphemy, and waits for good things even in the midst of all evils.

So when I am instructed by faith in the word of God and lay hold of Christ, believing in Him with my whole heart, I am righteous through this knowledge. Once I am justified by faith through this knowledge, the devil — the father of lies — immediately moves to extinguish my faith through his tricks and cunning, that is, through lies, errors, and heresies. And because he is also a murderer, he seeks to crush it through outright violence. Here hope, fighting and wrestling, lays hold of what faith has revealed and overcomes the devil as he attacks faith. After this victory come peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In this way, faith and hope are so

close together that they can hardly be told apart — yet a real difference between them exists. To make this clearer, I will illustrate with an analogy.

In civil government, prudence and courage are distinct virtues, yet they are so intertwined that they cannot easily be separated. Courage is the constancy of mind that does not fall apart under adversity but endures steadfastly and waits for better things. But courage without prudence to guide it is nothing but recklessness. Equally, prudence without courage to sustain it is empty and worthless. Just as prudence in civil affairs is useless without courage, so in the spiritual life faith without hope is nothing. Hope endures adversity, holds steady in it, and in the end overcomes all evils. And just as courage without prudence degenerates into rashness, so hope without faith becomes a kind of spiritual presumption — a tempting of God. Without the knowledge of Christ and truth that faith provides, hope has nothing to stand on — it is merely blind rashness and arrogance. A godly person must therefore above all have a sound understanding shaped by faith, so that the mind can be guided through afflictions and learn to hope for those good things which faith has revealed.

In short: faith is born from teaching, because teaching instructs the mind in what is true. Hope is born from encouragement, because encouragement stirs up hope in the midst of affliction — strengthening the one already justified by faith so that he is not overcome by hardship but is able to resist it more powerfully. Without faith's spark of light, however, the will cannot be persuaded to lay hold of hope. Faith teaches us, helps us understand and know heavenly wisdom, enables us to grasp Christ, and keeps us in His grace. But the moment we lay hold of Christ by faith and

confess Him, our enemies — the world, the flesh, and the devil — rise up against us and pursue us with fierce hatred, attacking us in body and spirit. We who believe and are justified by faith therefore wait in the Spirit for the hope of our righteousness. We wait with patience, because what we see and feel is the exact opposite — the world and its ruler the devil assail us forcefully, both inwardly and outwardly. Sin still remains in us as well, dragging us down into grief. Yet we do not give up. We lift our minds powerfully through faith, which gives light, teaches, and guides. In this way we remain firm and steady, and we overcome all adversity through Him who has loved us — until the righteousness we believe and wait for is fully revealed. By faith we begin, by hope we continue, and by revelation we will receive the whole. In the meantime, while we live here, we teach the word because we believe — publishing the knowledge of Christ to others. In doing so we suffer persecution — as the Scripture says, 'I believed, and therefore I spoke, and I was greatly afflicted' — with patience, strengthened and encouraged through hope. Scripture comforts us with the sweetest and most reassuring promises, revealed and taught to us by faith (Romans 15), so that through patience and the encouragement of Scripture we may have hope. And so hope grows and increases in us.

Paul therefore joins patience in tribulations and hope together — not without reason — in Romans 5 and 8 and elsewhere, because tribulations are what stir hope up. Faith, as I have noted before, comes before hope — it is the beginning of life and precedes all tribulation, for it comes to know Christ and lays hold of Him before the cross arrives. Yet the knowledge of Christ cannot long remain without the cross, without troubles and conflicts. In those struggles, the mind must be stirred up to spiritual courage — for

hope is nothing other than spiritual courage, just as faith is nothing other than spiritual wisdom — and that courage consists in patient endurance, as Scripture says: 'through patience...' Three things therefore dwell together in the faithful: faith, which teaches the truth and guards against error; hope, which endures and overcomes all adversity, both physical and spiritual; and love, which works all good things, as the text that follows makes clear. In this way a person is whole and complete in this life — both inwardly and outwardly — until the righteousness he is waiting for is revealed: a perfect and eternal righteousness.

This passage also contains both remarkable doctrine and remarkable comfort. On the doctrinal side, it shows that we are made righteous not by the works, sacrifices, or ceremonies of Moses's law — much less by the works and traditions of men — but by Christ alone. Everything in us apart from Him is of the flesh, not of the Spirit. Whatever the world counts as good and holy without Christ is nothing but sin, error, and flesh. Circumcision and the observance of the law, along with the works, religious practices, and vows of monks and all who trust in their own righteousness, are therefore entirely fleshly. But we, says Paul, stand in an entirely different place — in the Spirit and in the inner person — for we possess Christ by faith, and in the midst of our afflictions we wait through hope for the righteousness we already hold by faith.

The comfort is this: in serious conflicts and terrors — when the felt weight of sin, heaviness of spirit, and despair are overwhelming, pressing deep into the heart and attacking it powerfully — you must not follow your own feelings. If you do, you will say: I feel the horrible terror of the law and the tyranny of sin — not merely re-

sisting me but overwhelming and enslaving me — and I feel no comfort or righteousness at all. Therefore I am a sinner, not a righteous person. And if I am a sinner, I am liable to eternal death. But you must wrestle against that feeling and say: although I feel utterly crushed and swallowed up by sin, and my heart tells me that God is offended and angry with me — in truth it is not so. My own sense and feeling are lying to me. The word of God — which in these terrors I must follow rather than my own feelings — teaches something altogether different: namely, that God is near to those whose hearts are broken, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. He does not despise a humble and contrite heart. And Paul makes clear here that those who are justified in the Spirit by faith do not yet feel the hope of righteousness — they are still waiting for it.

So when the law accuses you, sin terrifies you, and you feel nothing but God's wrath and judgment — do not despair. Take up the armor of God: the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, the sword of the Spirit, and prove what kind of soldier you are. Lay hold of Christ by faith — He who is Lord over the law, over sin, and over everything that comes with them. By believing in Him you are justified — not because reason tells you so or because your heart feels it when you are tempted, but because the word of God says so. And in the midst of these conflicts and terrors, which often return to test you, wait patiently through hope for the righteousness you already have by faith — even though it is as yet only begun and incomplete — until it is fully revealed and perfected in the kingdom of heaven.

But you will say: I don't feel any righteousness in myself — or if I do, I barely feel it. You must not feel, but believe that you have righteousness. And unless you believe that you are righteous, you do great injury to Christ — who has cleansed you by the washing of water through the word, who died on the cross, condemned sin, and destroyed death, so that through Him you might obtain righteousness and eternal life. You cannot deny these things — unless you openly choose to be wicked, to blaspheme God, and to despise God along with all His promises and Jesus Christ and all His benefits. And if you cannot deny them, then you cannot deny that you are righteous.

Let us therefore learn this: in the midst of great and terrible terrors, when our conscience feels nothing but sin and concludes that God is angry with us and Christ has turned His face away — we must not follow the sense and feeling of our own heart, but cling to the word of God. That word says God is not angry but looks with compassion on the afflicted, on those who are troubled in spirit and tremble at His word — and that Christ does not turn away from those who are weary and burdened, but refreshes and comforts them. This passage therefore teaches plainly that the law and works bring us no righteousness or comfort at all — that is the work of the Holy Spirit alone, through faith in Christ, who raises up hope in terrors and tribulations, and through hope endures and overcomes all adversity. Very few people know how weak and fragile faith and hope are under the cross, in the heat of conflict — they seem like smoldering flax ready to be snuffed out by a strong wind. But those who believe in the midst of these attacks and terrors, hoping against hope — fighting through faith in the promise concerning Christ, against the felt weight of sin and God's wrath —

discover afterward through experience that this tiny spark of faith (which seems barely perceptible to natural reason) is like a mighty fire that swallows up all our sins and all our terrors.

There is nothing more precious to the true children of God than this teaching. Those who understand it know something the whole world is ignorant of: that sin, death, and every other misery, affliction, and calamity — whether physical or spiritual — work for the benefit and advantage of the elect. They also know that God is most near to them precisely when He seems farthest away, and that He is most merciful and loving precisely when He seems most angry, as though He were afflicting and destroying them. They know that they have an eternal righteousness that they are waiting for through hope as a secure and certain possession stored up for them in heaven — even when they are in the grip of sin's most terrible terrors. And they know that they are lords of all things precisely when they seem most stripped of everything, as the saying goes: 'having nothing, yet possessing all things.' This, Scripture says, is what it means to find comfort through hope. But this wisdom is not learned without many great and repeated temptations.

Verse 6. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

That is to say: faith that is not false or hypocritical, but genuine and alive. This is the faith that actively expresses itself and produces good works through love. In other words: anyone who wants to be a true Christian and belong to Christ's kingdom must be a true believer. But a person does not truly believe if works of love do not follow from his faith. So Paul shuts out hypocrites from both sides — right and left alike. On the left he shuts out the Jews and all who seek to earn their own salvation, saying: in Christ, cir-

cumcision means nothing — no works, no religious service, no form of worship, no way of life in the world, but only faith without any trust in works or merits counts before God. On the right he shuts out all the careless and passive people who say: if faith justifies without works, let us do nothing — let us only believe and live however we like. No — Paul says something different entirely. Although it is true that faith alone justifies, Paul is speaking of faith in a different respect here: after it has justified, faith is not idle but active and busy, working through love. Paul in this passage therefore lays out the whole life of a Christian: inwardly it consists in faith toward God, and outwardly in love and good works toward one's neighbor. So a person is a perfect Christian inwardly through faith before God — who has no need of our works — and outwardly before people, to whom our faith is of no direct benefit but our love and works are. When we understand that the shape of Christian life is faith and love, however, we still have not said what faith or love actually is — that is a further question. As for faith — its inner nature, power, and purpose — Paul has spoken about this earlier, showing that it is our righteousness, or more precisely our justification before God. Here he joins faith with love and works — speaking now of faith's outward function, which is to move us to do good works and to bear the fruits of love for the benefit of our neighbor.

Verse 7. You were running well. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

These are straightforward words. Paul affirms that he is teaching them the truth — the same truth he taught them before — and that they were running well as long as they obeyed it, meaning they believed and lived rightly. But now they were no longer doing so,

having been led astray by the false apostles. He also uses a fresh way of speaking here, calling the Christian life a race or course. Among the Hebrews, 'to run' or 'to walk' means to live or to conduct oneself. Teachers run when they teach with purity, and listeners or students run when they receive the word with joy and the fruits of the Spirit follow. This is what happened while Paul was among them, as he testified in chapters 3 and 4. Here he says: 'You were running well' — meaning everything was going forward well and happily among you, you were living rightly, you were on the right path toward the eternal life promised you by God's word.

The words 'you were running well' carry within them a singular comfort. A temptation that frequently troubles godly people is the feeling that their life looks more like a slow crawl than a run. But if they remain in sound doctrine and walk in the Spirit, they should not be troubled if their progress seems slow or barely moving. God judges it very differently. What seems to us like barely crawling is, in God's sight, running swiftly. What seems to us like nothing but sorrow, grief, and death is before God joy, gladness, and true happiness. This is why Christ says: 'Blessed are you who mourn and weep, for you will be comforted — you will laugh.' Everything will turn out for the best for those who believe in the Son of God — whether it is sorrow or even death itself. They are therefore true runners indeed, and whatever they do, it moves well and advances happily by the working of God's Spirit, who knows nothing of slow progress.

Verse 7. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Those who fall from faith and grace back into the law and works are the ones who are hindered in this race — as happened to the Galatians when they were misled and seduced by the false apostles, whom Paul indirectly rebukes with these words: 'Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?' Similarly, back in chapter 3, he said: 'Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?' Paul shows in passing that people can be so powerfully bewitched by false doctrine that they embrace lies and heresies in place of truth and sound spiritual teaching. At the same time, they insist that the sound doctrine they once loved is in error, while their error is the sound doctrine — and they defend it with everything they have. This is exactly what the false apostles did to the Galatians, who had started out running well: they brought them to believe that they had been in error and making no progress under Paul. But afterward, having been seduced by the false apostles and fallen completely from the truth, they were so thoroughly convinced by the false persuasion that they thought they were in a good state and running very well. The same thing happens today to those who are led astray by sectarians and fanatical spirits. This is why I often say that falling away in doctrine does not come from human weakness but from the devil, and it is the most dangerous of falls — from the heights of heaven to the bottom of hell. Those who persist in error are so far from recognizing their sin that they hold it to be the highest righteousness. It is therefore impossible for them to obtain forgiveness.

Verse 8. This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.

This is a great comfort and a remarkable teaching, showing how false persuasions rooted in hearts by wicked teachers can be dislodged. The false apostles were impressive figures who out-

wardly appeared to surpass Paul in both learning and godliness. The Galatians, taken in by this show, believed that when they heard them they were hearing Christ Himself, and so they concluded that this persuasion was from Christ. Paul, by contrast, demonstrates that this teaching and persuasion did not come from Christ — the One who had called them in grace — but from the devil. In this way he drew many of them away from the false persuasion. In the same way, we today can bring back many who have been seduced from error, when we show them that their opinions are fantastical, wicked, and full of blasphemy.

This comfort also applies to all who are afflicted and who, through temptation, have formed a false opinion of Christ. For the devil is a wonderfully skilled persuader who knows how to magnify the smallest sin — indeed even a trivial thing — until the person under temptation believes it to be an enormous and horrifying crime worthy of eternal damnation. The troubled conscience in that moment must be comforted and lifted up in the same way Paul lifted up the Galatians: by showing that this thought and persuasion does not come from Christ — because it contradicts the Gospel's word, which presents Christ not as an accuser or a harsh taskmaster but as a gentle, humble-hearted, merciful Savior and comforter.

But if Satan outmaneuvers this — for he is a cunning craftsman who will try every approach — and brings Christ's own words and example against you like this: 'Yes, Christ is gentle and merciful — but to those who are holy and righteous. To sinners He threatens wrath and destruction (Luke 13). He also declares that unbelievers are condemned already (John 3). Moreover, Christ did many good works and suffered many evils, and He commands us to follow His

example. But your life matches neither His word nor His example — you are a sinner, there is no faith in you, you have done nothing good — and therefore the words that present Him as a severe judge apply to you, not the comforting words that present Him as a loving and merciful Savior...' When the devil attacks this way, the person under temptation must comfort himself as follows.

Scripture presents Christ to us in two ways. First, as a gift. When I receive Him in this way, I lack nothing — for all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, and He has been made for me by God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. So even though I have committed many and grievous sins, if I believe in Him, they are all swallowed up by His righteousness. Second, Scripture presents Him as an example to be followed. But I will not accept Christ as an example — except in times of joy and peace, when I am free from temptation (where I can scarcely imitate even a thousandth part of what He did), so that I may use Him as a mirror to see clearly how much I still lack, and not become careless and self-satisfied. In times of tribulation, I will not receive Christ in any other way than as a gift — as the One who died for my sins, gave me His righteousness, and accomplished for me what was lacking in my own life. For He is the end and fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

It is important to know these things — not only so that each of us may have a reliable remedy in times of temptation, enabling us to escape the poison of despair with which Satan seeks to kill us, but also so that we can resist the furious sectarians and schismatics of our day. The Anabaptists consider nothing more central to their whole teaching than pressing the example of Christ and the

cross with great severity — especially given the clear passages in which Christ commends the cross to His disciples. We must learn therefore how to resist Satan when he disguises himself as an angel of light. We do this by distinguishing between Christ set before us as a gift and Christ set before us as an example. Each way of presenting Christ has its proper time and occasion — if that is not observed, the very preaching of salvation can be turned into poison. Christ must therefore be presented to those who are already crushed and broken under the weight of their sins as a Savior and a gift, not as an example or a lawgiver. But to those who are complacent and hardened, He must be set forth as an example. In their case, the harsh passages of Scripture must also be laid before them — the terrible examples of God's wrath, such as the flood that drowned the whole world and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah — so that they may repent. Let every Christian, then, when he is terrified and afflicted, learn to reject the false impression of Christ that temptation has created, and say: 'Accursed Satan, why do you argue with me about doing and working, when I am already terrified and crushed under the weight of my sins?' 'Since I am weary and burdened, I will not listen to you — an accuser and destroyer — but to Christ the Savior of all people, who says He came into the world to save sinners, to comfort those in terror, anguish, and despair, and to proclaim release to the captives.' This is the true Christ, and there is no other. I can look to Abraham, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Paul, and other saints for examples of holy living. But they cannot forgive my sins, they cannot deliver me from the power of the devil and from death, they cannot save me and give me eternal life. These things belong to Christ alone — the One whom God the Father has sealed — and so I will

not listen to you or accept you as my teacher, O Satan, but only to Christ, of whom the Father said: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased — listen to Him.' Let us learn to comfort ourselves through faith in this way, in temptation and in the face of false doctrine — otherwise the devil will either seduce us through his ministers or kill us with his fiery arrows.

Verse 9. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

This entire letter bears witness to how deeply Paul was grieved by the Galatians' fall, and how repeatedly he hammered home — sometimes with sharp rebuke, sometimes with tender appeal — the enormous and serious consequences that would follow from their fall if they did not repent. This fatherly and apostolic concern of Paul's moved some of them not at all — many of them no longer acknowledged Paul as their teacher, preferring the false apostles far above him, from whom they believed they had received true doctrine rather than from Paul. The false apostles had no doubt also been slandering Paul among the Galatians, calling him a stubborn and argumentative person who would break the unity of the churches over a trivial matter — for no reason other than to be the only one considered wise and to receive their admiration. Through this slander they made Paul deeply offensive to many of them.

Others, who had not yet completely abandoned his teaching, thought there was no real danger in differing from him slightly on the doctrine of justification and faith. So when they heard Paul treating as a serious matter what seemed to them small and insignificant, they were puzzled and thought to themselves: even if we have drifted somewhat from Paul's teaching and there has been some fault in us, it is only a small thing — he should overlook it, or at least not magnify it so forcefully, lest the unity of the churches

be broken because of it. To this Paul responds with the saying: 'A little leaven leavens — or sours — the whole lump of dough.' This is a warning Paul presses with great insistence. We also ought to take it very seriously today, for our opponents make the same charge against us — that we are quarrelsome, stubborn, and inflexible in defending our doctrine even in matters they consider minor. But these are the devil's clever tricks, by which he works to destroy our doctrine completely. We therefore answer with Paul: a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

In philosophy it is said that a small error at the beginning becomes a large and ugly error in the end. In the same way, in theology a single small error overturns the whole teaching. We must therefore sharply separate life from doctrine. The doctrine is not ours — it is God's, and we are only called to be His servants. Therefore we may not change or diminish a single word of it. Our life, however, is our own — and regarding that, we are ready to do, to suffer, to forgive whatever our opponents may require of us, as long as faith and doctrine remain sound and uncorrupted. On that we always say with Paul: a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

A tiny speck in the eye injures the eye. Our Savior Christ says: 'The lamp of the body is the eye: when your eye is clear, your whole body is full of light; but when your eye is bad, your body is full of darkness' (Luke 11:34). And again: 'If your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illuminated' (Luke 11:36). By this analogy Christ teaches that the eye — that is, doctrine — must be perfectly simple, clear, and pure, without any darkness or cloudiness. The apostle James says the same: 'Whoever fails in one point has become guilty of all' (James 2:10). This passage therefore strongly supports us against those critics

who accuse us of destroying charity to the great harm and damage of the churches. We declare openly that we desire nothing more than to be at peace with everyone — so long as they leave to us the doctrine of faith whole and uncorrupted, to which everything must yield: love, an apostle, or even an angel from heaven.

Let them therefore praise love and harmony as much as they like — but on our side let us hold the majesty of the word and faith in the highest honor. Love can be set aside in certain times and places without real harm — but the word and faith cannot. Love bears all things, yields to everyone. Faith, by contrast, bears nothing and yields to no one. In yielding, in believing, in giving and forgiving, love is often deceived — yet even when deceived, it suffers no loss that counts as true loss: it does not lose Christ. And so it is not offended, but continues steadfastly doing good even toward the ungrateful and unworthy. In the matter of faith and salvation, however — when people teach lies and errors under the guise of truth and lead many astray — love has no place there. In that case we are not simply losing a gift given to the ungrateful; we are losing the word, faith, Christ, and eternal life. Let us not therefore be moved by their insistence on maintaining love and harmony — for whoever does not love God and His word, it does not matter how much or what else he loves.

Paul therefore uses this saying to warn both teachers and hearers not to treat the doctrine of faith as something trivial, to be tinkered with as they please. It is like a brilliant ray of sunlight coming down from heaven, giving light, direction, and guidance. Just as all the world's wisdom and power cannot stop or deflect the rays

of the sun streaming down from heaven to earth, so nothing may be added to the doctrine of faith or taken from it — for any such change completely disfigures and destroys the whole.

Verse 10. I have confidence in you in the Lord.

It is as if he said: I have taught, warned, and corrected you enough so that you will hear me — and yet I have good hope of you in the Lord. A question arises here: does Paul do right to say he has good hope and confidence in the Galatians, given that Scripture forbids us to put our trust in human beings? Both faith and love involve a kind of trust and belief, but they differ because they have different objects. Faith trusts in God and therefore cannot be deceived; love trusts in people and therefore is often deceived. Yet this trust that flows from love is so necessary to life that without it no human society can function. For if no one trusted or believed anyone else, how would we live together on earth? True Christians in fact trust others more readily through love than worldly people do — because trust toward other people is a fruit of the Spirit, or of Christian faith, in the godly. This is why Paul had confidence in the Galatians, even though they had fallen from his teaching — but he qualified it: 'in the Lord.' As if to say: I trust you to the extent that the Lord is in you and you are in Him — that is, to the extent that you remain in the truth. If you fall away from it, seduced by the devil's ministers, I will no longer trust you. This is the proper way for the godly to trust and believe in other people.

Verse 10. That you will take no other view.

Meaning: concerning doctrine and faith — that you will hold no different view from what I have taught you and you received from me. In other words: I have every hope and confidence that you will

not accept any teaching that contradicts mine.

Verse 10. But the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

With this verdict Paul, sitting as a judge on the bench, condemns the false apostles, calling them by a sharp and damning name: troublers of the Galatians — men the Galatians considered very godly and far better teachers than Paul. At the same time he tries to alarm the Galatians with this terrible sentence, boldly condemning the false apostles so that the Galatians will flee their false teaching as they would a deadly plague. It is as if he said: Why do you listen to these destructive men who are not teaching you but only troubling you? The doctrine they hand you is nothing but a burden on your consciences. Therefore, however important they may appear, they will bear their condemnation.

From the words 'whoever he is,' a person can gather that the false apostles were men of very impressive outward appearance and seeming holiness. There was perhaps even among them a well-known disciple of the apostles with great authority and reputation. Paul does not use such forceful and pointed language without reason. He speaks the same way in chapter 1: 'Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached, let him be accursed' (Galatians 1:8). And without doubt many were offended by the apostle's vehemence, thinking to themselves: Why is Paul breaking unity? Why is he so obstinate over such a small matter? Why does he so rashly pronounce eternal condemnation on those who are fellow ministers? Paul pays no attention to any of this — he presses on, boldly cursing and condemning all who corrupt the doctrine of faith, however highly they may be regarded, however holy and learned they appear.

We must therefore — as I warn often — carefully distinguish between doctrine and life. Doctrine is heaven; life is the earth. In life, sin, error, uncleanness, and misery are mingled together like vinegar, as the proverb says. In the realm of life, let love overlook, forbear, be deceived, believe, hope, and endure all things — let forgiveness of sins be practiced as fully as possible, so long as sin and error are not defended and upheld. But in doctrine there is no room for error, and therefore no need for pardon. There is simply no comparison between doctrine and life. A single small point of doctrine is worth more than heaven and earth — and for that reason we cannot tolerate even the slightest corruption of it. But we can very well overlook the offenses and failures of daily life. We all err in daily conduct — even all the saints do — and they freely confess this in the Lord's Prayer and in the Creed. But our doctrine, God be praised, is pure — all our articles of faith are grounded in holy Scripture. The devil would gladly corrupt and overthrow them, and so he attacks us with this clever argument: that we ought not to break charity and the unity of the churches.

Verse 11. But I, brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

Paul, working by every possible means to draw the Galatians back, now argues from his own example. I have brought on myself, he says, the hatred and persecution of the priests, the elders, and my entire nation — because I deny righteousness to circumcision. If I were to grant it that righteousness, the Jews would not only stop persecuting me but would love me and praise me highly. But because I preach the Gospel of Christ and the righteousness of faith, abolishing the law and circumcision, I suffer persecution.

The false apostles, by contrast, preach circumcision precisely to avoid the cross and to escape the deadly hatred of the Jewish nation — and in doing so they keep and maintain the favor of the Jews. As he says in chapter 6: 'They compel you to be circumcised.' Moreover, they wanted to achieve peace and harmony between the Gentiles and the Jews. But that is impossible without sacrificing the doctrine of faith, which is the doctrine of the cross and is full of offense. So when Paul says, 'If I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished,' he means that it would be a serious problem if the offense of the cross were to cease. He speaks the same way in 1 Corinthians 1: 'Christ sent me not to preach the Gospel with clever words, lest the cross of Christ be made of no effect.' As if to say: I would not want the offense and cross of Christ to be taken away.

Someone might object here: then Christians are madmen — deliberately throwing themselves into danger, doing nothing by preaching and confessing the truth except drawing the hatred and hostility of the whole world upon themselves and stirring up endless offense. Paul's answer is that this does not trouble or discourage him at all — on the contrary, it makes him bolder and gives him confidence for the Gospel's happy success and growth, since the church flourishes and grows precisely under the cross. For it is fitting that Christ, the head and husband of the church, should reign in the midst of all His enemies (Psalm 110). On the other hand, when the cross is removed and the fury of tyrants and heretics ceases, when offenses quiet down and everything seems peaceful and the devil quietly holds the door — that is the surest sign that the pure doctrine of God's word has been taken away.

Bernard, reflecting on this, says that the church is in its best condition precisely when Satan assails it from every side — both through subtle tricks and through open violence — and that it is in its worst condition when it is most at ease. He aptly applies to the complacent church that saying of Hezekiah in his song: 'Behold, for my welfare I had great bitterness.' Paul therefore takes it as the surest sign that it is not the true Gospel if it is being preached in peace. The world, by contrast, takes it as the surest sign that the Gospel is heretical and dangerous doctrine, because it sees great upheaval, turmoil, offense, and sects following in its wake. And so God sometimes shows Himself in the likeness of the devil, and the devil shows himself in the likeness of God — and God will be known through the appearance of the devil, and the devil will be known through the appearance of God.

The cross follows immediately upon the preaching of the word, according to the saying in Psalm 116: 'I believed and therefore I spoke, and I was greatly troubled.' The cross of Christians is persecution with shame and disgrace, and without any compassion — which makes it deeply offensive. First, Christians suffer as though they were the worst people in the world — as the prophet Isaiah foretold even of Christ Himself (Isaiah 53:12): 'He was numbered with transgressors.' Beyond that, even murderers and thieves have their punishments administered with some measure of restraint, and people feel some compassion for them — and in their case there is no particular shame or disgrace attached to the punishment. With Christians it is the opposite: the world judges them to be the most dangerous and harmful of all people, and concludes that no punishment is severe enough for their offenses. It feels no compassion for them, but puts them to death in the most shameful

and disgraceful ways it can devise. And it imagines it is gaining a double benefit by doing so — first, that it is rendering God high service by killing them; second, that public peace and order are being restored by removing such plagues. The death and cross of the faithful is therefore deeply full of offense. But do not let this shameful treatment, the ongoing cross of Christ, and its offense discourage you, says Paul — rather, let it confirm you. For as long as the cross endures, the Gospel will prosper.

Christ likewise comforts His disciples in Matthew 5: 'Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven — for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' The church cannot allow this joy to be taken from her. For this reason, I would not want to be in harmony with the Pope, the bishops, the princes, or the sectarians — unless they were willing to agree to our doctrine. Such harmony would be a certain sign that we had lost the true doctrine. To put it plainly: as long as the church preaches the Gospel, it must suffer persecution. For the Gospel proclaims the mercy and glory of God — and it exposes the devil's malice and schemes, revealing him for what he really is and stripping from him the false disguise of divine majesty by which he deceives the whole world. It shows that all forms of worship, religious orders, and traditions invented by men — regarding celibacy, foods, and similar things — through which people hope to earn forgiveness of sins and eternal life, are wicked and diabolical. Nothing stirs up the devil more than the preaching of the Gospel, for it tears from him his disguise as God and exposes him for what he truly is — the devil, not God. It is therefore inevitable that as long as the Gospel flourishes, the cross

and its offense must follow — unless the devil is being barely grazed rather than truly hit. But when he is truly struck, he does not rest — he rages horribly and stirs up trouble everywhere.

If Christians, then, want to hold onto the word of life, let them not be afraid or discouraged when they see the devil break loose and rage everywhere — the whole world in an uproar, tyrants exercising their cruelty, and heresies springing up. Let them assure themselves that these are signs not of terror but of joy, as Christ Himself explains: 'Rejoice and be glad.' God forbid, then, that the offense of the cross should be removed. That would happen if we were to preach what the ruler of this world and his servants want to hear — the righteousness of works. Then we would have a tame devil, a friendly world, a gracious Pope, and merciful princes. But because we proclaim the benefits and glory of Christ, they persecute us and strip us of both our possessions and our lives.

Verse 12. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

Is it appropriate for an apostle not only to denounce the false apostles as troublers, to condemn them and hand them over to Satan, but also to wish that they might be completely rooted out and perish? Is this not outright cursing? Paul, I believe, is playing on circumcision here. It is as if he said: they force you to cut away the foreskin of your flesh — but I wish they themselves would be cut away entirely by the root.

A question arises: is it lawful for Christians to curse? Why not — though not always and not for every reason. But when it reaches the point where God's word is being slandered and His doctrine blasphemed, and therefore God Himself is being dishonored, then

we must take this position and say: 'Blessed be God and His word — and let everything that is against God and His word be accursed, even if it is an apostle or an angel from heaven.' As he said in chapter 1: 'Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we preached, let him be accursed.'

This shows how seriously Paul took even a little leaven — seriously enough to curse the false apostles who in outward appearance were men of great standing and holiness. We must therefore not treat the leaven of false doctrine as a small matter. However tiny it may be, if left unchecked it will gradually cause truth and salvation to be lost, and God Himself to be denied. For when the word is corrupted — and God must then be denied and blasphemed, which inevitably follows from a corrupted word — there is no hope of salvation left. If we ourselves are cursed, mocked, and killed, there is still One who can raise us up again and deliver us from the curse, from death, and from hell.

Let us therefore learn to honor and magnify the authority of God's word. It is no trivial thing, as some confused minds today imagine — every syllable of it is greater than heaven and earth. Therefore in this matter we give no consideration to Christian charity or harmony — we take the seat of judgment, so to speak, and curse and condemn everyone who in the slightest way disfigures or corrupts the majesty of God's word. For a little leaven leavens the whole lump. But if they leave God's word to us whole and sound, we are not only willing to maintain charity and peace with them — we offer ourselves as their servants and will do whatever we are able for them. If not, let them perish and sink into hell —

and not only them, but the whole world — so long as God and His pure word remain. For as long as He remains, life, salvation, and the faithful will also remain.

Paul therefore does right in cursing those who trouble the Galatians, and in pronouncing sentence against them: that they are accursed along with everything they teach and do, and that he wishes them cut off — especially rooted out of the church of God, meaning he wishes that God would not guide or prosper their teaching or their deeds. This curse proceeds from the Holy Spirit. Peter likewise curses Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8: 'Your money perish with you.' Holy Scripture uses such cursing frequently against those who torment consciences, especially in the Psalms — as in Psalm 55: 'Let death come deceptively upon them; let them go down alive to the pit.' And again: 'Let the wicked be turned into hell, and all the nations who forget God.'

Up to this point Paul has fortified the teaching of justification with strong and powerful arguments. Beyond that, in order to leave nothing out, he has woven in throughout: sharp rebukes, words of praise, earnest appeals, warnings, and similar things. At the end he also adds his own example — that he suffers persecution for this doctrine — thereby warning all the faithful not to be offended or dismayed when they see such upheavals, sects, and offenses arising in the time of the Gospel. Rather, let them rejoice and be glad — for the more fiercely the world rages against the Gospel, the more the Gospel prospers and advances.

This comfort ought to encourage us today as well, for it is certain that the world hates and persecutes us for no other reason than that we confess the truth of the Gospel. It does not charge us with theft, murder, sexual immorality, or anything like that — it

detests and abhors us because we faithfully and purely teach Christ and will not abandon the defense of truth. We can therefore be completely confident that our doctrine is holy and from God — because the world hates it so bitterly. There is no doctrine, however wicked, foolish, or harmful, that the world will not gladly accept, embrace, and defend, even honoring and flattering those who teach it and doing everything possible for them. The only teaching it utterly abhors and works every possible harm against is the true Gospel of life and salvation — and its teachers. It is therefore clear proof that the world's fierce hatred of us is for no other reason than its hatred of the word. When our opponents therefore charge that nothing comes from this doctrine but wars, rebellions, offenses, sects, and endless other evils, let us answer: blessed be the day when we see these things. The whole world is in an uproar — and good. For if the world were not so disturbed, if the devil did not rage and stir up such turmoil, we would not have the pure doctrine of the Gospel, which cannot be preached without these conflicts and upheavals following. What you count as a great evil, we count as a special blessing.

The Doctrine of Good Works

Now come exhortations and practical instructions about life and good works. It is the apostles' custom, after teaching faith and instructing consciences, to add directives about good works — urging the faithful to practice acts of love toward one another. Natural reason can to some extent understand and grasp this part of teaching, but the doctrine of faith is entirely beyond its reach. To make clear that Christian teaching does not destroy good works or conflict with civil order, the apostle also urges us to practice good works and live honorably in our outward conduct, and to maintain love and peace with one another. The world therefore has no just grounds to accuse Christians of destroying good works or troubling public peace and decency — for Christians teach good works and all other virtues better than any philosopher or ruler in the world, because they join faith together with what they do.

Verse 13. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

It is as if he said: You have now obtained liberty through Christ — you stand far above all laws in your conscience and before God; you are blessed and saved; Christ is your life. Even though the law, sin, and death trouble and terrify you, they cannot ultimately harm you or drive you to despair. This is your excellent and immeasurable liberty. Now you must take care that you do not use that liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.

This is a common evil and the most destructive of all the things Satan stirs up through the doctrine of faith: in the case of many people, he turns the liberty with which Christ has set us free into freedom for the flesh. The apostle Jude also laments this in his letter: 'Certain people have crept in,' he says, 'who turn the grace of our God into sensuality.' The flesh is completely ignorant of the doctrine of grace — it does not understand that we are made righteous not by works but by faith alone, and that the law has no authority over us. So when the flesh hears the doctrine of faith, it corrupts and abuses it into self-indulgence, immediately reasoning: if we are without law, let us live however we please, do no good, give nothing to the poor, and refuse to endure anything — for there is no law that compels or obliges us to do otherwise.

There is therefore danger on both sides, though one is more tolerable than the other. If grace and faith are not preached, no one can be saved — for faith alone justifies and saves. But if faith is preached, as it must be, the majority of people understand the doctrine of faith in a fleshly way and twist the freedom of the Spirit into freedom for the flesh. We see this throughout every level of society, high and low alike. Everyone claims to be a follower of the Gospel and boasts of Christian liberty — yet they serve their own desires, giving themselves over to greed, pleasures, pride, envy,

and other vices. No one faithfully does his duty, no one lovingly meets his brother's need. This grieves me so deeply that I sometimes wish these swine, who trample precious pearls underfoot, were still under the Pope's tyranny — for it seems impossible to govern this kind of people with the peaceful Gospel.

Even we who teach the word do not carry out our duties today with the same zeal and diligence we had before, when we were still in the darkness of ignorance. The more certain we become of the freedom Christ has purchased for us, the colder and more careless we grow in handling the word, in prayer, in doing good, and in enduring hardship. If Satan did not trouble us inwardly with spiritual temptations and outwardly through the persecution of our opponents — and beyond that through the contempt and ingratitude of our own associates — we would become completely careless, lazy, and useless for every good work. Over time we would lose the knowledge and faith of Christ, abandon the ministry of the word, and seek an easier life for the flesh. Many of our own people are beginning to do exactly this, because those laboring in the ministry of the word cannot even support themselves on their work — and are in fact treated most shamefully by the very people who were delivered from the Pope's bondage through the preaching of the Gospel. These men, turning away from the poor and lowly Christ, entangle themselves in the affairs of this present life, serving their own appetite and not Christ — and what fruit that will bear, they will discover by experience in the time to come.

Since we know that the devil lays his most careful traps for us who possess the word — for the rest he holds captive and enslaved at his pleasure — and since he works with all his strength to take from us the liberty of the Spirit, or at least to twist it into fleshly

liberty, we teach and urge our brothers with particular care and diligence, following Paul's example: this liberty of the Spirit, purchased by Christ's death, was not given so that we might use it as an excuse for fleshly self-indulgence — or as Peter says, as a cover for wickedness — but so that we might serve one another through love.

So that Christians do not abuse this liberty, as I have said, the apostle places on the flesh a yoke and a form of service through the law of mutual love. Let the godly therefore remember that in conscience before God they are free from the law's curse, from sin, and from death — for Christ's sake. But as for their bodies, they are servants and must serve one another through love, in accordance with Paul's command here. Let every person therefore strive to do his duty faithfully in whatever calling he has, and to help his neighbor to the best of his ability. This is what Paul requires of us here: serve one another through love. These words do not set Christians loose into freedom — they place them under obligation with regard to the flesh.

This teaching about mutual love — which we must maintain and practice toward one another — cannot be driven into the heads of fleshly people or made to sink into their hearts. Christians gladly receive and obey this teaching. Others, the moment liberty is preached, immediately reason: 'If I am free, I can do as I please. This thing is mine — why should I not sell it for as much as I can get?' 'And since good works don't earn salvation, why should I give anything to the poor?' And so they carelessly throw off the yoke of service in the flesh and turn the liberty of the Spirit into self-indulgence and fleshly freedom. But we tell these careless despisers — though they do not believe us and only laugh at us — that if they

use their bodies and possessions purely to satisfy their own desires (which they do: they do not help the poor or lend to the needy, but cheat their brothers in business dealings, grabbing and hoarding whatever they can by any means), then they are not free, however much they boast of their liberty. They have lost Christ and Christian liberty, have become the devil's slaves, and under the banner of Christian liberty are seven times worse than they were under the Pope's tyranny. For the devil who was driven out of them has taken seven other spirits more wicked than himself and returned into them — and so their last state is worse than the first.

As for us, we have God's command to preach the Gospel, which freely offers to all people — for Christ's sake, through faith — liberty from the law, sin, death, and God's wrath. It is not within our power to hide or withdraw the liberty the Gospel has now proclaimed, for Christ gave it to us freely and purchased it by His death. We also cannot force those who plunge headlong into every kind of fleshly excess and self-indulgence to use their bodies and goods to help others. So we do what we can — we warn them earnestly that they ought to do so. If our warnings accomplish nothing, we commit the matter to God, and He will repay these scorners with just punishment in His own time. In the meantime, our comfort is this: among the godly, our labor is not wasted — many have undoubtedly been delivered through our ministry from the devil's bondage and brought into the liberty of the Spirit. These few — who recognize the glory of spiritual liberty and are in turn ready through love to serve others, knowing themselves to be debtors to their brothers in the flesh — bring us more joy than the vast multitude of those who abuse this liberty can bring us discouragement.

Paul uses very fitting and clear language here: 'Brothers, you have been called to liberty.' And to ensure that no one imagines he is talking about fleshly liberty, he immediately explains what kind of liberty he means: 'Only do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.' Let every Christian therefore know that in the conscience, Christ has made him lord over the law, sin, and death, so that they have no power over him. At the same time, let him know that this external obligation is placed on his body — that he must serve his neighbor through love. Those who understand Christian liberty any other way are using the Gospel's benefits for their own destruction, and under the name of Christ are worse idolaters than they were under the Pope. Paul now proceeds to explain, drawing from the ten commandments, what it actually means to serve one another through love.

Verse 14. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

After laying the foundation of Christian doctrine, Paul is in the habit of building on it with gold, silver, and precious stones. There is no other foundation, as he himself says to the Corinthians, than Jesus Christ — or Christ's righteousness. On this foundation he now builds good works — genuine good works — and sums them all up in one command: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' It is as if he said: when I say you must serve one another through love, I mean exactly what the law says in another place: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' This is what it truly means to interpret Scripture and God's commandments.

In giving these instructions about love, Paul is also quietly taking a jab at the false teachers — firmly opposing them in order to defend and establish his teaching on good works against them. It is as if he said: O Galatians, until now I have taught you the true spiritual life, and now I will also teach you what genuine good works actually are. I am doing this so you may understand that the empty and foolish ceremonial works the false apostles keep insisting on are far inferior to works of love. Such is the foolishness and madness of all false teachers and fanatical spirits: not only do they abandon the true foundation and sound doctrine, but even in their superstitions they never manage to arrive at genuine good works. As Paul says, they build nothing but wood, hay, and stubble on the foundation. The false apostles, who were the most enthusiastic advocates of works, never taught or required works of love — that Christians should love one another, help their neighbors in every need, giving not only their possessions but their very selves: their voice, their hands, their hearts, their whole strength. All they insisted on was circumcision, the observation of days, months, years, and seasons — they could not teach any other kind of good work. For once they destroyed the foundation, which is Christ, and obscured the doctrine of faith, it was impossible for any true practice, exercise, or understanding of good works to remain. Remove the tree, and the fruit must perish.

The apostle therefore urges Christians earnestly to practice good works after they have heard and received the pure doctrine of faith. Even in those who have been justified, remnants of sin still remain — and just as they resist faith and hinder it, they also hinder us from doing good works. Beyond that, human reason and the flesh — which in the saints themselves resists the Spirit, and in the

ungodly reigns with great force — are naturally drawn to self-made religious practices. Reason takes more pleasure in imagining God according to its own ideas than in knowing Him through His word, and it pursues its own chosen works with far more enthusiasm than the works God has actually commanded. It is therefore necessary for godly preachers to teach and press the doctrine of good works just as earnestly as the doctrine of faith — for Satan is a deadly enemy to both. Faith, however, must come first — because without faith it is impossible to understand what a good work is or what pleases God.

Let no one think he has thoroughly grasped this commandment: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The words are very short and seem simple — but show me the teachers and hearers who actually teach, learn, and live it out rightly. The words 'serve one another through love' and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself' are in fact beyond our full grasp, and no one — not even the godly — adequately considers, teaches, and practices them. And here is a remarkable thing: the faithful are so sensitive that if they leave out even some small religious practice they think they ought to do, their conscience is immediately troubled — but they are far less troubled when they neglect the duties of love (as they do every day) or fail to bear sincere and brotherly affection toward their neighbor. They give more weight to their own religious customs than to the commandment of love — and from that tendency they are never fully free in this life.

Paul therefore rebukes the Galatians with these words: 'For the whole law is fulfilled in one word.' It is as if he said: you are drowning in superstitions and ceremonies about places and times, which help neither you nor anyone else — and meanwhile you ne-

glect love, which is the only thing you were truly obligated to keep. What madness is this? As Jerome says: 'We wear out our bodies with vigils, fasting, and labor — but we neglect love, which is the only true queen and ruler of all works.' This can be seen clearly in the monks, who strictly observe their regulations about ceremonies, fasting, vigils, clothing, and the like. If they leave out even the smallest of these things, they consider it a deadly sin. But when they not only neglect love but actively hate one another to the point of death — they consider that no sin at all.

By this commandment, therefore, Paul not only teaches good works — he also condemns fantastical and self-invented works. He not only builds gold, silver, and precious stones on the foundation — he also tears down the wood and burns up the hay and stubble. God showed plainly through examples in the Old Testament how highly He has always valued love — a love to which He would have even the law itself and its ceremonies give way. When David and his companions were hungry and had nothing to eat, they ate the consecrated bread of the Presence, which the law permitted only to the priests and not to laypeople. Christ's disciples broke the Sabbath by picking heads of grain, and Christ Himself broke the Sabbath (as the Jews charged) by healing the sick on that day. All these examples show that love must take priority over all laws and ceremonies, and that God requires nothing from us so much as love toward our neighbor. Christ confirms the same when He says: 'The second commandment is like the first.'

Verse 14. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word.

As if he said: Why do you burden yourselves with the law? Why do you wear yourselves out with the law's ceremonies — with rules about foods, days, places, and similar things: what to eat and

drink, how to keep feasts, when to offer sacrifices? Leave these follies behind and hear what I say: the whole law is fully contained in this one saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' God takes no delight in the observance of the law's ceremonies, nor does He need them. The only thing He requires of you is this: that you believe in Christ whom He has sent — in whom you are made complete and have everything. But if you want to add laws to faith — which is itself the most pleasing service of God — then know this: all laws are summed up in this brief command: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Apply yourselves to keeping this command — and in keeping it, you have fulfilled all laws.

Paul is a masterful interpreter of God's commandments — he condenses all of Moses into a brief summary, showing that everything contained in his countless laws amounts to this one short sentence: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Natural reason is put off by the apparent simplicity and brevity of this, for it seems quickly said: 'Believe in Christ,' and again, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' So reason despises both the doctrine of faith and true good works. Yet this seemingly plain and lowly word of faith — 'Believe in Christ' — is the power of God to those who believe, through which they overcome sin, death, and the devil, and through which they also attain salvation and eternal life. And serving one another through love — instructing those who go astray, comforting the afflicted, lifting up the weak, helping your neighbor in every possible way, bearing with his weaknesses, enduring trouble, hard work, ingratitude, and contempt in the church; and in civil life, obeying the governing authorities, giving proper honor to parents, bearing patiently with a difficult spouse and an unruly household — these are works that reason dismisses as worthless.

But trust me: they are works whose excellence and value the whole world cannot begin to comprehend — for the world does not measure works or anything else by the word of God, but by the judgment of wicked, blind, and foolish reason. In fact, the world does not even recognize the value of a single one of the least of truly good works.

When people imagine they already understand the commandment of love, they are thoroughly deceived. They do have it written in their hearts in a general way — natural conscience tells them to treat others as they want to be treated. But having the principle written in one's heart is not the same as understanding it. For if they truly understood it, they would also carry it out and would place love above all their other works. They would not place such high value on their self-invented religious exercises — going about with somber faces, bowing their heads, staying unmarried, living on bread and water, dwelling in the wilderness, wearing threadbare clothing, and so on. These strange and self-made religious practices — which God neither commanded nor approved — they consider so holy and superior that they eclipse and overshadow love itself, which is the sun around which all good works revolve. So profound and incomprehensible is the blindness of human reason that it cannot judge rightly either about the doctrine of faith or about outward conduct and works. We must therefore fight fiercely on two fronts: against the opinions of our own hearts — to which we are naturally more drawn in the matter of salvation than to the word of God — and against the impressive and holy-looking disguise of our self-invented works. The goal is to learn to honor works done in one's God-given calling, however outwardly lowly and insignificant they may appear — as long as they have the war-

rant of God's word — and to despise the works that reason chooses for itself without God's command, however excellent and holy they may seem.

I have treated this commandment at length elsewhere, and so I will pass over it briefly here. The words 'love your neighbor as yourself' are short, but they are well chosen and perfectly apt. No one can give a more reliable or more vivid illustration than one's own self. So if you want to know how your neighbor ought to be loved, and want a clear example, look at how you love yourself. If you were in need or danger, you would be very glad to have the goodwill and friendship of everyone around you, to be helped by their counsel, their resources, and their strength. You need no book to instruct you on how to love your neighbor — you carry the best book of all in your own heart. You need no teacher for this — simply ask your own heart, and it will tell you well enough: treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated. Beyond that, love is a remarkable virtue that makes a person ready and willing to serve his neighbor not only with words, hands, money, and possessions, but with his very body and even his life. And it does all this not as a response to good behavior, nor is it deterred by bad behavior or ingratitude. A mother nourishes and cherishes her child simply because she loves it.

My neighbor is everyone — especially whoever is in need of my help, as Christ explains in Luke 10. Even if someone has wronged me or harmed me in some way, he has not thereby stopped being human, stopped being flesh and blood, stopped being a creature of God most like myself — in short, he has not stopped being my neighbor. As long as the nature of a human being remains in him, the commandment of love also remains — requiring me not to de-

spise my own flesh, not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good. Otherwise, love will never match what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13.

Paul therefore commends love to the Galatians and to all the faithful — for they alone truly love in practice — and urges them to serve one another through love. It is as if he said: you do not need to burden yourselves with circumcision and the ceremonies of Moses's law. Stay above all in the doctrine of faith you received from me. Then if you want to do good works, I will show you in one word the greatest and most important work of all, and how to fulfill the whole law: serve one another through love. You will not lack people to do good to — the world is full of those who need the help of others. This is a perfect and sound doctrine of faith and love — the shortest and also the longest theology there is. Shortest in words and sentences — but in practice it is broader, deeper, and higher than the whole world.

Verse 15. But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not destroyed by one another.

By these words Paul testifies that when the foundation — faith in Christ — is overturned by false teachers, neither peace nor harmony can remain in the church, in doctrine or in life. Different opinions and divisions must inevitably arise in both, until one person bites and devours another — judging and condemning each other — until they are consumed. Not only Scripture but the examples of every age bear witness to this. After Africa was corrupted by the Manichaeans, the Donatists immediately followed — and they, dividing among themselves, split into three separate sects. And how many sects are springing up today, one after another? One sect gives birth to another, and each condemns the rest. When the

unity of the Spirit is broken, it is impossible for any harmony to remain in doctrine or life — new errors must keep arising, without limit and without end.

Paul therefore teaches that these sources of division are to be avoided, and shows how they can be avoided. This is the way to unity and harmony, he says: let every person do his duty in the calling God has given him, not exalting himself above others or criticizing other people's work while praising his own, but serving one another through love. This is true and straightforward teaching about good works. Those who have made shipwreck of faith and formed fantastical ideas about faith and works do not teach this — instead, disagreeing among themselves about doctrine and works, they bite and devour one another, accusing and condemning each other, just as Paul says of the Galatians here. 'If you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not destroyed by one another.' As if to say: do not accuse and condemn one another over circumcision, the observation of holy days, or other ceremonies — rather, give yourselves to serving and helping one another through love. For if you continue biting and devouring, take care that you are not consumed — that is, that you do not perish utterly, even physically, which commonly happens to the founders of sects, as it did to Arius and others, and to some in our own time. Whoever builds on sand with hay, stubble, and similar materials must eventually fall and be destroyed — for all those things are made for the fire. I will not even mention that after such mutual biting and devouring, the ruin and destruction not of one city but of whole countries and kingdoms usually follow. Now the apostle shows what it actually means to serve one another through love.

It is a difficult and dangerous thing to teach that we are made righteous by faith without works, and yet at the same time to insist on works. Unless Christ's ministers are faithful and skilled stewards of God's mysteries — accurately dividing the word of truth — faith and works are quickly confused. Both doctrines — of faith and of works — must be carefully taught and pressed, yet in such a way that each stays within its proper bounds. Otherwise, if works alone are taught (as happens in the papal kingdom), faith is lost. If faith alone is taught, carnal people immediately conclude that works are unnecessary.

The apostle has just above begun to urge good works and to teach that the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Now someone will say: Paul throughout this entire letter has removed righteousness from the law — for he says, 'By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified,' and 'As many as are under the works of the law are under the curse.' But now, when he says the whole law is fulfilled in one word, he seems to have forgotten what he has been arguing throughout this letter and to hold the opposite view — namely, that those who do works of love fulfill the law and are righteous. He answers this objection as follows.

Verse 16. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

It is as if he had said: I have not forgotten my earlier argument about faith, nor am I now retracting it by urging mutual love and saying the whole law is fulfilled through love. I hold the same position I held before. So that you will understand me correctly, I add this: walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

A refutation of the scholastics' argument: 'Love is the fulfillment of the law; therefore the law justifies.'

Even though Paul speaks here clearly and plainly enough, he has made little headway against a misunderstanding. The scholastic theologians, not understanding this passage — 'love is the fulfillment of the law' — drew this conclusion from it: if love is the fulfillment of the law, it follows that love is righteousness; therefore if we love, we are righteous. These learned scholars argue from the word to the work, from a doctrine or command to its practical outcome, like this: 'The law has commanded love, therefore the work of love immediately follows.' But this is a foolish inference — you cannot draw a valid conclusion by arguing directly from a command to its performance.

It is true that we ought to fulfill the law and be made righteous through fulfilling it — but sin prevents this. The law does command us to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves — but it does not follow: 'it is written, therefore it is done; the law commands love, therefore we love.' Not a single person can be found anywhere on earth who loves God and his neighbor the way the law requires. In the life to come, however, when we are thoroughly cleansed of every vice and sin and made as pure and bright as the sun, we will love perfectly and be righteous through perfect love. In this life, that purity is prevented by the flesh — sin remains in our flesh as long as we live. Because of this, the corrupt love of ourselves is so powerful that it far outweighs our love for God and neighbor. In the meantime, so that we may be righteous in this life as well, we have Christ as our mercy seat and throne of grace — and because we believe in Him, sin is not counted against us. Faith is therefore our righteousness in this life.

But in the life to come, when we have been thoroughly cleansed and freed from all sin and fleshly desire, we will no longer need faith and hope — we will then love perfectly.

It is a serious error, therefore, to attribute justification and righteousness to love — which is nothing, or if something, is not sufficient to appease God — for love even in the faithful is imperfect and impure, and nothing unclean shall enter the kingdom of God. What sustains us in the meantime is this confidence: that Christ, who alone committed no sin and in whose mouth no deceit was ever found, covers us with His righteousness. Sheltered by this cloud, hidden under this canopy — this heaven of forgiveness of sins and throne of grace — we begin to love and to fulfill the law. Yet this fulfilling does not justify us or make us acceptable to God while we live here. But when Christ has delivered up the kingdom to God His Father, abolished all earthly rule and authority, and God is all in all — then faith and hope will cease, and love will be perfect and eternal (1 Corinthians 13). This is what the papal scholastics do not understand — and so when they hear that love is the sum of the whole law, they immediately conclude: therefore the law justifies. Or when they read in Paul that faith makes a person righteous, they add: yes, faith formed and furnished with love. But that is not Paul's meaning, as I have shown at length before.

If we were pure of all sin and burning with perfect love toward God and our neighbor, then we would indeed be righteous and holy through love, and God could require nothing more of us. But this does not happen in the present life — it is reserved for the life to come. Here we do receive the gift and firstfruits of the Spirit, so that we begin to love — though very weakly. But if we truly and perfectly loved God as the law requires — 'You shall love the Lord

your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength' — then we would be as content with poverty as with wealth, with pain as with pleasure, with death as with life. In fact, whoever could truly and perfectly love God in this way would not long survive in this life — he would be immediately overwhelmed and consumed by that love.

But human nature is so thoroughly corrupted and drowned in sin that it cannot have any right thought or feeling about God. It does not love God — it hates Him deeply. As John says: 'We did not love God, but He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' And as Paul says in chapter 2: 'Christ loved me and gave Himself for me.' And in chapter 4: 'But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.' Redeemed and justified by this Son, we begin to love — as Paul says in Romans 8: 'What the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh — so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' — that is, might begin to be fulfilled. Everything the scholastics and sophists have taught about fulfilling the law is therefore mere fantasy.

Paul therefore shows through these words — 'walk by the Spirit' — how he intends to be understood when he says 'serve one another through love' and 'love is the fulfillment of the law.' It is as if he said: When I urge you to love one another, what I am actually requiring is that you walk by the Spirit. For I know that you will not fully fulfill the law — sin still dwells in you as long as you live,

and so complete fulfillment is impossible. Nevertheless, in the meantime, strive diligently to walk by the Spirit — that is, wrestle in the Spirit against the flesh and follow the Spirit's promptings.

It is clear, then, that Paul had not forgotten the matter of justification. When he says 'walk by the Spirit,' he is plainly denying that works justify. It is as if he said: when I speak of fulfilling the law, I do not mean that you are justified by the law. What I mean is this: there are two opposing forces at war within you — the Spirit and the flesh. God has stirred up a conflict and a battle in your bodies: the Spirit fights against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit. All I require of you is that you follow the Spirit as your captain and guide, and that you resist the flesh as your enemy — for that is the full extent of what you are capable of doing. Obey the Spirit and fight against the flesh. So when I teach you to keep the law and urge you to love one another, do not think I am retracting what I taught about the doctrine of faith, or that I am now attributing justification to the law or to love. My meaning is that you should walk by the Spirit and not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Paul's words are fitting and well chosen. It is as if he said: we have not yet arrived at the full keeping of the law — so we must walk in the Spirit and be active in it, thinking, speaking, and doing what belongs to the Spirit, and resisting what belongs to the flesh. And so he adds:

Verse 16. And you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

As if he said: the desires of the flesh are not yet dead in us — they spring up again and fight against the Spirit. No faithful person's flesh is so well-disciplined that, when offended, it does not bite and devour, or at least fall short of that commandment of

love in some way. At the first provocation, a person cannot restrain himself — he is angry at his neighbor, desires revenge, and treats him as an enemy, or at the very least does not love him as much as he should and as this commandment requires. And this happens even to the faithful.

The apostle has therefore given this rule for the faithful: they must serve one another through love, bear one another's burdens and weaknesses, and forgive one another. Without this bearing and forbearing through love, it is impossible for peace and harmony to be maintained among Christians. It is inevitable that you will often offend and be offended. You see many things in me that trouble you, and I see many things in you that displease me. If we do not bear with one another through love, there will be no end to division, conflict, envy, hatred, and bitterness.

Paul therefore wants us to walk by the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the desire of the flesh. It is as if he said: even when you are provoked to anger and displeasure against your brother who has offended you or done something seriously wrong to you — resist and suppress those violent impulses through the Spirit. Bear with his weakness and love him, according to the commandment: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Your brother does not stop being your neighbor because he stumbles or offends you — on the contrary, that is precisely when he most needs you to show him love. And this commandment — 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' — requires exactly that: that you not follow the flesh, which when offended hates, bites, and devours. Wrestle against it in the Spirit, and continue through the Spirit in love for your neighbor, even when you can find nothing in him that seems worthy of love.

The scholastics took 'the desires of the flesh' to mean sexual lust. It is true that even the godly — especially the young — are tempted by sexual desire. Even married people, so corrupt and troublesome is the flesh, are not free from such impulses. Let every person therefore — and now I am speaking to married men and women among the godly — honestly examine themselves, and many will no doubt find that the appearance and qualities of another person's spouse appeal to them more than their own. They find their own lawful spouse unappealing and are drawn to someone who is off-limits. And this commonly happens not in marriage alone but in practically everything. People take for granted what they have and long for what they don't have — as the poet says: 'We are always drawn to forbidden things and desire what is denied us.'

I do not deny that the desire of the flesh includes sexual lust — but it is not limited to that. Fleshly desire encompasses all corrupt affections that infect even the faithful — some more, some less: pride, hatred, greed, impatience, and the like. Indeed, Paul lists among the works of the flesh not only these more obvious vices but also idolatry, heresies, and such things. It is clear, then, that he is speaking of the full range of fleshly desire and the whole reign of sin, which even in the godly — who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit — fights against the reign of the Spirit. So when he says 'you will not carry out the desire of the flesh,' he is speaking not only of sexual lust, pride, greed, and so on, but also of unbelief, distrust, despair, hatred and contempt of God, idolatry, heresies, and everything like these. It is as if he said: I am writing to you that you should love one another. This you do not do, and cannot do, because of the flesh — which is infected and corrupted with de-

sire, and does not merely stir up sin in you but is itself sin. For if you had perfect love, no hardship or adversity would be great enough to harm or hinder it — it would spread through your entire being. There would be no wife, however unattractive, whom her husband would not love completely, with no desire for any other woman, however beautiful. But this is not the case — and so it is impossible for us to be made righteous through love.

Do not think I am retracting or taking back what I taught about faith — faith and hope must continue: by faith we are justified, and by hope we are sustained in adversity and enabled to endure to the end. We also serve one another through love, because faith does not sit idle — but love as we practice it is weak and small. When I therefore say 'walk by the Spirit,' I make it plain enough that you are not justified through love.

And when I urge you to walk by the Spirit so that you do not fulfill the desire of the flesh, I am not requiring that you completely strip away the flesh or destroy it — only that you restrain and subdue it. For God intends humanity to continue until the last day, and that cannot happen without parents to bear and raise children. As long as this continues, the flesh must continue — and therefore sin must continue, for the flesh is never without sin. So in regard to the flesh we are sinners, and in regard to the Spirit we are righteous — we are in part sinners and in part righteous. Nevertheless, our righteousness is far more abundant than our sin, because the holiness and righteousness of Christ our Mediator infinitely surpasses the sin of the whole world — and the forgiveness of sins we have through Him is so great, so complete, and so unlimited that it easily swallows up all sins, as long as we walk according to the Spirit.

The papists imagined that this commandment applied only to their clergy, and that the apostle was urging them to live chastely by subduing the flesh through vigils, fasting, hard labor, and so on — and that by doing so they would not fulfill the desire of the flesh, meaning sexual lust. As though the entire desire of the flesh were conquered when sexual impulse was suppressed — which they were never able to achieve by any yoke they placed on the body. Jerome himself — I will say nothing of others — who was a passionate advocate and defender of chastity, openly admits this. 'How often,' he says, 'did I imagine myself surrounded by the pleasures and delights of Rome, even when I was in the scorched wilderness, that sun-baked wasteland that makes such an ugly home for monks?' And again: 'I, who had confined myself to such a prison for fear of hell, often imagined I was dancing among young women, when my only companions were scorpions and wild beasts. My face was pale with fasting, but my mind was on fire with desires in my cold body — and although my flesh was already half dead, the flames of desire burned within me.'

If Jerome felt such flames of fleshly desire while living in the barren wilderness on bread and water — what do you imagine our self-indulgent clergymen feel, who gorge themselves with every kind of delicacy until it is a wonder they do not burst? These things are written, then, not for hermits and monks (as the papists imagine), nor only for sinners in the world — they are written for the whole church of Christ, and for all the faithful, whom Paul urges to walk by the Spirit so they will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. That means not only bridling the grosser impulses of the flesh —

sexual lust, anger, impatience, and similar things — but also the spiritual ones: doubting, blasphemy, idolatry, contempt and hatred of God, and everything like these.

Paul, as I have said, does not require the godly to completely strip away or destroy the flesh — only to restrain it so that it becomes subject to the Spirit. In Romans he tells us to care for our flesh. Just as we may not be cruel to other people's bodies or burden them with unreasonable demands, we may not be cruel to our own bodies either. According to Paul's instruction, we must tend to our flesh enough that it can sustain the labors of both mind and body — but only for genuine need, not to feed its desires. So if your flesh begins to grow restless and wayward, suppress it and hold it in check through the Spirit. If that is not possible, get married — for it is better to marry than to burn with desire. In doing these things you walk by the Spirit — that is, you follow God's word and do His will.

Verse 17. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

When Paul says the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, he is telling us that we must feel the pull of fleshly desire — not only sexual desire, but also pride, anger, heaviness, impatience, unbelief, and the like. Yet he wants us to feel these things without consenting to them or acting on them — without thinking, speaking, or doing what the flesh is pushing us toward. If the flesh moves us toward anger, for instance, we are to be angry in such a way — as the fourth psalm teaches — that we do not sin. As if Paul were saying: I know the flesh will provoke you toward anger, envy, doubt, unbelief, and similar things — but resist it through the Spirit, so that you do not

sin. If you abandon the Spirit's leading and follow the flesh, you will carry out the desires of the flesh, and you will die, as Paul says in Romans 8. This saying of the apostle must therefore be understood not of sexual desire alone but of the entire reign of sin.

Verse 17. For these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

These two forces — the flesh and the Spirit — are at war with each other within you, he says, so that you cannot do what you would. This passage makes it plain that Paul is writing these things to the faithful — to the church that believes in Christ, has been baptized, justified, renewed, and fully forgiven. Yet even of this church he says that it has flesh rebelling against the Spirit. He speaks the same way about himself in Romans 7: 'I am fleshly, sold into bondage to sin.' And again: 'I see a different law in my body's members, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin which is in my members.' And: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?'

Here both the scholastics and some of the early fathers struggle greatly, trying to find some way to excuse Paul. It seems to them unfitting and almost absurd to say that such a chosen vessel of Christ should have sin. But we believe Paul's own words, in which he plainly confesses that he is sold into bondage to sin, that he is taken captive by sin, that there is a law in his members warring against him, and that in his flesh he serves the law of sin. Some respond that the apostle is speaking in the voice of a wicked person. But wicked people do not complain about the flesh's rebellion, about inner conflict and warfare, or about being taken captive by sin — sin reigns in them without resistance. This is therefore Paul's own complaint, and the complaint of all the faithful. Those who

have argued that Paul and all the faithful have no sin have done great harm — because this misguided view (which comes from not understanding the doctrine of faith) has robbed the church of a singular comfort, abolished the forgiveness of sins, and made Christ of no effect.

When Paul says 'I see a different law in my body's members,' he is not denying that he has flesh and the vices of the flesh. It is quite possible that he sometimes felt the stirring of sexual desire. But doubtless these impulses were largely kept down in him by the great and constant afflictions and temptations — both inward and outward — with which he was almost continually burdened, as his letters show. And if at any time, when he was strong and in good spirits, he felt the desire of the flesh, anger, impatience, or similar things — he resisted them through the Spirit and did not allow those impulses to rule over him. We must not therefore allow these comforting passages — in which Paul describes in his own person the warfare of the flesh against the Spirit — to be obscured by foolish explanations. The scholastics, monks, and those like them never experienced true spiritual temptation — so they fought only to suppress and overcome sexual desire, and being proud of a victory they never actually won, they thought themselves far holier than married people. I will not dwell on how under this holy pretext they nourished every kind of horrible sin: divisiveness, pride, hatred, contempt of neighbors, trust in their own righteousness, presumption, disdain for true godliness and the word of God, unbelief, blasphemy, and the like. Against these sins they never fought at all — in fact, they did not even consider them sins. They placed righteousness in the keeping of their foolish and wicked vows, and unrighteousness in failing to keep them.

But this must be our foundation and anchor: Christ is our only and perfect righteousness. Even if we have nothing else to hold to, these three things remain, as Paul says: faith, hope, and love. We must therefore always believe and always hope, always laying hold of Christ as the head and source of our righteousness. 'Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame' (Romans 9:33). We must also strive to be outwardly righteous — that is, not consenting to the flesh, which is constantly trying to draw us toward some evil, but resisting it through the Spirit. We must not be overcome by impatience at the ingratitude and contempt of people who abuse Christian liberty — but through the Spirit we must overcome this and every other temptation. To the extent that we strive against the flesh through the Spirit, we are outwardly righteous — though this righteousness does not commend us before God.

Let no one despair if he often feels the flesh stirring up fresh conflict against the Spirit, or if he cannot immediately subdue the flesh and make it obedient to the Spirit. I too wish I had a bolder and more steadfast heart — one that could not only confidently disregard the threats of tyrants and the heresies, offenses, and turmoil stirred up by Satan and his soldiers, the enemies of the Gospel, but could also immediately shake off spiritual anguish and distress, and in short, could face death without fear and receive it as a welcome guest. But I find a different law in my body's members, fighting against the law of my mind. Others wrestle with lesser temptations — poverty, shame, impatience, and the like.

Let no one be surprised or overwhelmed when he feels in his body this war of the flesh against the Spirit — let him take courage and comfort himself with Paul's words: 'the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit,' and 'these are in opposition to one another, so

that you may not do the things that you please.' By these words Paul comforts those who are tempted. It is as if he said: it is impossible for you to follow the Spirit's leading in everything without any feeling of the flesh's pull or resistance. The flesh will resist — and will resist and hinder you so that you cannot do what you sincerely want to do. It is enough in that case if you resist the flesh and do not carry out its desires — if you follow the Spirit rather than the flesh, which easily gives way to impatience, craves revenge, bites, grumbles, hates God, rages against Him, despairs, and so on. So when a person feels this warfare of the flesh within him, let him not be discouraged — but resist in the Spirit and say: I am a sinner, and I feel sin in me, for I have not yet put off the flesh, in which sin dwells as long as it lives. But I will obey the Spirit and not the flesh — I will lay hold of Christ by faith and hope, I will lift myself up through His word, and being so lifted up, I will not carry out the flesh's desire.

It is very good for the godly to know this and to keep it firmly in mind — for it gives extraordinary comfort in times of temptation. When I was a monk, I immediately thought I was completely lost whenever I felt the desire of the flesh stir — that is, whenever I felt an evil impulse, sexual desire, anger, hatred, or envy toward a brother. I tried many approaches to calm and settle my conscience, but nothing worked — the desire and longing of my flesh kept returning, and I could never rest, tormented by thoughts like: 'You have committed this or that sin; you are infected with envy, impatience, and other sins — you entered this holy order for nothing, and all your good works are worthless.' If I had properly understood these words of Paul — 'the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh' and 'these are in opposition

to one another, so that you cannot do the things you would' — I would not have tormented myself so miserably. Instead I would have thought and said to myself, as I now commonly do: 'Martin, you will not be entirely without sin, for you have flesh — and you will therefore feel its battle, as Paul says: the flesh resists the Spirit.' 'Do not despair — but resist it firmly and do not carry out its desires.' 'In doing so, you are not under the law.'

I recall that Staupitz used to say: 'I have vowed to God more than a thousand times that I would become a better man — but I never kept what I vowed. From now on I will make no such vow, for experience has taught me I cannot keep it. Unless God is gracious and merciful to me for Christ's sake, and grants me a blessed hour when I depart this miserable life, I will not be able, with all my vows and all my good works, to stand before Him.' This was not merely true — it was a godly and holy despair, and everyone who wants to be saved must confess the same thing, both from the heart and with the mouth. For the godly do not trust in their own righteousness but say with David: 'Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no living person is righteous.' And again: 'If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?' They look to Christ their Reconciler, who gave His life for their sins. They also know that the remaining sin in their flesh is not counted against them but is freely pardoned. In the meantime, they fight in the Spirit against the flesh so that they will not carry out its desires. And even when they feel the flesh raging and rebelling against the Spirit, and even when they themselves sometimes fall into sin through weakness — they are not discour-

aged or convinced that their life, their calling, and the works they do in that calling are displeasing to God. They lift themselves up by faith.

The faithful therefore receive great comfort from this teaching of Paul — knowing that they are partly flesh and partly Spirit, yet in such a way that the Spirit rules and the flesh is subdued and kept under, so that righteousness governs and sin serves. Whoever does not know this teaching — and who, thinking the faithful should be entirely without fault, sees the opposite in himself — will sooner or later be overwhelmed by a spirit of heaviness and fall into despair. But whoever knows this teaching well and uses it rightly finds that the very things that are evil work for good in his case. When the flesh provokes him toward sin, that very provocation drives him to seek forgiveness through Christ and to embrace the righteousness of faith — which otherwise he would not value so highly or pursue so eagerly. It is therefore very good for us to sometimes feel the wickedness of our nature and the corruption of our flesh — because this wakes us and stirs us toward faith and toward calling on Christ. And by this means a Christian becomes a powerful craftsman and a remarkable creator — turning sorrow into joy, terror into comfort, sin into righteousness, and death into life, as he presses down and restrains the flesh and makes it subject to the Spirit.

Let those who feel the desire of the flesh therefore not despair of their salvation. Let them feel it and all its force — only let them not consent to it. Let the passions of lust, anger, and similar vices shake them — as long as they do not overthrow them. Let sin assault them — as long as they do not carry it out. In fact, the more godly a person is, the more intensely he feels this battle. It is from

this battle that those anguished cries of the faithful come, found throughout the Psalms and the whole of Scripture. Of this battle the hermits, the monks, the scholastics, and all who seek righteousness and salvation through works know nothing whatsoever.

But someone might say: it is dangerous to teach that a person is not condemned for not immediately overcoming the impulses and passions of the flesh he feels — for when this is taught among ordinary people, it makes them careless, indifferent, and lazy. This is exactly what I said earlier: if faith is taught, fleshly people neglect and reject works; if works are required, faith and comfort of conscience are lost. There is no rule that can compel people or be prescribed for everyone alike. Rather, let every person examine himself carefully to find which passion of the flesh he is most prone to — and when he finds it, let him not be careless or make excuses for himself, but watch and wrestle in the Spirit against it, so that even if he cannot completely bridle it, he at least does not carry out its desire.

All the children of God have experienced and felt this battle of the flesh against the Spirit — we feel and prove it too. Anyone who honestly examines his own conscience — if he is not a hypocrite — will find confirmed in himself exactly what Paul says here: that the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit. All the faithful therefore feel and confess that their flesh resists the Spirit, and that these two forces within them are so opposed to each other that try as they may, they cannot do what they want. The flesh therefore holds us back so that we cannot keep God's commandments, cannot love our neighbors as ourselves — much less love God with all our hearts. It is therefore impossible for us to become righteous through the works of the law. Yet there is in us a good will — and

there must be, for it is the Spirit itself that resists the flesh — which sincerely wants to do good, fulfill the law, love God and neighbor, and so on. But the flesh does not obey this good will — it resists it. And yet God does not count this sin against us — for He is merciful to those who believe, for Christ's sake.

But it does not follow from this that you should treat sin lightly just because God does not count it against you. It is true that He does not count it. But to whom, and on what basis? To those who repent and lay hold by faith on Christ the mercy seat — for whose sake all their sins are forgiven, and the remaining sin still in them is not counted against them. They do not minimize their sin — on the contrary, they take it as seriously as it truly deserves. They know it cannot be taken away by penances, works, or righteousness, but only by Christ's death. And yet the greatness and severity of their sin does not cause them to despair — they are confident that it will not be counted against them.

I say this lest anyone think that after receiving faith, sin is of little importance. Sin is truly sin, whether a person commits it before or after coming to know Christ. And God always hates sin — in itself, every sin is damnable. But the reason it is not damnable to the believer is Christ — who by His death has taken away sin. For the unbeliever, on the other hand, not only every sin is damnable — even his good works are sin, according to the saying: 'Whatever is not from faith is sin.' The error of the scholastics is therefore most dangerous — they distinguish sins according to the act, not according to the person. The believer has just as great a sin as the unbeliever — but to the believer it is forgiven and not counted; to the unbeliever it is not forgiven but counted. To the believer it is non-damning; to the unbeliever it is deadly and condemning — not

because of any difference in the sins themselves, or because the believer's sin is smaller and the unbeliever's greater, but because of the difference in the persons. The faithful person assures himself through faith that his sin is forgiven — because Christ gave Himself for it. Therefore, even though sin is in him and he sins daily, he remains godly — while the unbeliever remains wicked. This is the true wisdom and comfort of the godly: although they have sins and commit them, they know that for Christ's sake those sins are not counted against them.

I say this for the comfort of the godly. For they are the ones who truly feel that they have sin and commit it — they feel that they do not love God as fervently as they should, that they do not believe Him as wholeheartedly as they want to, that they often doubt whether God cares about them, that they are impatient and angry with God in adversity. From this, as I have said, come the sorrowful complaints of the faithful found throughout Scripture, especially in the Psalms. Paul himself laments that he is sold into bondage to sin, and says here that the flesh resists and rebels against the Spirit. But because they put to death the deeds of the flesh through the Spirit — as he says elsewhere, and also at the end of this chapter: 'they crucify the flesh with its passions and desires' — these sins do not harm or condemn them. But if they obey the flesh and carry out its desires, they lose faith and the Holy Spirit. And if they do not recoil from their sin and return to Christ — who has given His church the power to receive and restore those who have fallen, so they may recover faith and the Holy Spirit — they die in their sins. We are therefore not speaking here of those who merely imagine they have faith while continuing to live in their sins. Their verdict is already pronounced: 'Those who live accord-

ing to the flesh will die.' And: 'The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these — I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

Here we can see who the true saints really are. They are not logs and stones, as the monks and scholastics imagine — never moved by anything, never feeling any impulse or desire of the flesh. On the contrary, as Paul says, their flesh sets its desire against the Spirit — and so they have sin, and both can and do sin. Psalm 32 bears witness that the faithful confess their unrighteousness and pray for forgiveness of their sin's guilt, where it says: 'I acknowledged my sin to You and did not hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord — and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to You.' Moreover, the whole church — which is indeed holy — prays that her sins may be forgiven, and she believes in the forgiveness of sins. David prays in Psalm 143: 'O Lord, do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no living person is righteous.' And in Psalm 130: 'If You, Lord, kept a record of iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness.' This is how the greatest saints and children of God speak and pray — David, Paul, and all the rest. All the faithful therefore speak and pray in the same way and with the same spirit. The papal scholastics either do not read Scripture, or if they do, they read it with a veil before their eyes — and so they cannot judge rightly about anything, including sin and holiness.

Verse 18. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Paul cannot forget his doctrine of faith — he keeps returning to it and pressing it in, even when he is treating the subject of good works. Someone might object here: how can it be said we are not under the law, when you yourself, Paul, teach us that we have flesh which sets its desire against the Spirit and fights against us, torments us and holds us captive? We feel sin, and cannot escape that feeling no matter how much we wish to. What is that if not being under the law? But Paul says: let this not trouble you. Only do your best to be led by the Spirit — that is, show yourself willing to follow and obey the will that resists the flesh and does not carry out its desires (for this is what it means to be led and drawn by the Spirit) — and you are not under the law. Paul says the same of himself in Romans 7: 'In my mind I serve the law of God' — meaning, in my spirit I am not subject to any sin — 'but in my flesh I serve the law of sin.' The faithful are therefore not under the law — that is, not in the Spirit — for the law cannot accuse them or pronounce death upon them, even though they feel sin and confess themselves to be sinners. Christ has stripped the law of its power — He was made subject to the law in order to redeem those who were under it. Therefore, what is truly sin and committed against the law in the faithful, the law cannot count as sin against them.

So great is the power and dominion of the Spirit that the law cannot accuse the godly, even when they do what is genuinely sin. For Christ is our righteousness, whom we grasp by faith — and He is without any sin, so the law cannot accuse Him. As long as we cling to Him, we are led by the Spirit and free from the law. So the apostle, even when teaching about good works, never loses sight of

his doctrine of justification — he always shows that it is impossible for us to be justified by works. The remnants of sin cling stubbornly in our flesh, and so as long as our flesh lives, it does not stop setting its desire against the Spirit. Yet no harm comes to us from this — because we are free from the law, as long as we walk by the Spirit.

These words — 'if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law' — can bring great comfort both to yourself and to others who are severely tempted. It often happens that a person is so violently assaulted with anger, hatred, impatience, sexual desire, terror, spiritual anguish, or some other desire of the flesh that he cannot shake it off no matter how hard he tries. What should he do in that situation? Should he despair? God forbid — but let him say this to himself: your flesh is fighting and raging against the Spirit. Let it rage as long as it likes — only make sure in every case that you do not consent to it or carry out its desires, but keep following the Spirit's leading. In doing this you are free from the law. It accuses and terrifies you, I grant — but entirely in vain. In this conflict between flesh and Spirit, therefore, there is nothing better than to keep the word of God before your eyes and to seek in it the Spirit's comfort.

And let the one who suffers this temptation not be dismayed that the devil can magnify sin so greatly that during the conflict he feels utterly overthrown and senses nothing but God's wrath and despair. In that situation, he must not follow his feelings or the judgment of his reason — but must firmly lay hold of this word of Paul: 'if you are led by the Spirit' — that is, if you lift yourself up and take comfort through faith in Christ — 'you are not under the law.' This will give him a strong shield with which to beat back all

the fiery arrows that wicked enemy throws at him. However much the flesh boils and rages, all its impulses and fury cannot harm or condemn him — because he, following the Spirit's leading, does not consent to the flesh or carry out its desires. So when the desires of the flesh surge and rage, the one remedy is to take up the sword of the Spirit — the word of salvation, which declares that God does not desire the death of a sinner but that he turn and live — and to fight with it. If we do this, we need not doubt that we will win the victory, even though during the battle everything seems to tell us otherwise. But set the word aside, and there is no counsel or help left. I speak from my own experience. I have endured many fierce and intense struggles. But the moment I laid hold of a passage of Scripture and anchored myself to it, my temptations immediately vanished — temptations I could not have endured for even a short time without the word, let alone overcome.

The sum of everything Paul has taught in this section about the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit is this: the saints and elect of God cannot fully accomplish what the Spirit desires. The Spirit would gladly be entirely pure — but joined to the flesh as it is, the flesh will not allow it. Nevertheless, the saints are saved through the forgiveness of sins, which is in Christ Jesus. And because they walk by the Spirit and are led by the Spirit, they are not under the law — the law cannot accuse or terrify them. Even when it tries with all its might to do so, it will never be able to drive them to despair.

Verse 19. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are...

This passage is similar to Christ's saying: 'By their fruits you will know them. Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Every good tree bears good fruit, and every bad tree bears

bad fruit.' Paul teaches exactly the same thing Christ taught: that works and fruits testify clearly enough whether the trees are good or bad — whether people are following the flesh or the Spirit. As if he said: in case any of you claims not to understand what I mean when I speak of the conflict between flesh and Spirit, I will set before you first the works of the flesh — many of which are recognized even by ungodly people (Matthew 7:10) — and then also the works of the Spirit.

Paul does this because there were many hypocrites among the Galatians — as there are among us today — who outwardly posed as godly people and boasted much of the Spirit, and who understood the true doctrine of the Gospel in the words — but who were not walking by the Spirit; they were walking by the flesh and carrying out its works. By this, Paul exposes them as not being the holy people they claimed to be. And to keep them from dismissing his warning, he pronounces against them this dreadful sentence — that they will not inherit the kingdom of heaven — in hopes that being so warned they will change. Every period of life brings its own characteristic temptations to even the faithful: sexual desire assails a person most in youth, ambition and empty glory in middle age, and greed in old age. There has never been a faithful person whom the flesh has not repeatedly provoked to impatience, anger, vainglory, and similar things throughout his lifetime. Paul is therefore speaking of the faithful when he says that the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit in them — they will never be free from the desires and conflicts of the flesh, yet these do not harm them. But we must draw this distinction: it is one thing to be provoked by the flesh and yet not willingly yield to its desires, but instead to follow the Spirit's leading and resist the flesh. It is entirely another

thing to give in to the flesh without fear or remorse, to carry out and persist in its works, while still pretending to be holy and boasting of the Spirit. To the first he gives comfort, saying they are led by the Spirit and are not under the law. To the second he threatens eternal destruction.

It does sometimes happen, nonetheless, that even saints fall and carry out the flesh's desires. David fell horrifically into adultery. He was also responsible for many deaths when he arranged for Uriah to be placed in the front of the battle — and in doing so he gave the enemies occasion to triumph over God's people, to boast in their idols, and to blaspheme the God of Israel. Peter also fell most gravely and terribly when he denied Christ. Yet even though these sins were great and serious, they were not committed out of contempt for God or with a willfully stubborn and defiant spirit — they were committed through weakness and failure. And when these men were confronted, they did not harden themselves and persist in their sin but repented. This is what Paul later urges in chapter 6: 'If anyone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.' Forgiveness is therefore not withheld from those who sin and fall through weakness — as long as they get back up and do not continue in their sin, for of all things, persistence in sin is the worst. But if they do not repent and instead continue stubbornly and willfully in their wickedness, carrying out the flesh's desires — that is a sure sign that something in their spirit is false.

No person will be free from desires and cravings as long as he lives in the flesh — and therefore no person will be free from temptation. Yet people are tempted in different ways, according to who

they are. One person is assaulted by the more intense and inward struggles — bitterness and spiritual anguish, blasphemous thoughts, distrust, and despair. Another is tempted by more outward and visible impulses — sexual desire, anger, envy, greed, and the like. In all these cases, Paul requires that we walk by the Spirit and resist the flesh. But whoever obeys the flesh and continues without any fear of God or remorse of conscience in carrying out its desires and cravings — let him know that he does not belong to Christ. However much he boasts the name of a Christian, he is only deceiving himself. For those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Who Are Rightly Called Saints, and Are So in Deed

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This passage, as I have also noted along the way, contains a remarkable comfort — for it teaches us that the saints and the holiest people in this world do not live free from fleshly desire and temptation, nor free from sin. It warns us not to follow the example of some people Gerson writes about, who labored to attain such a level of perfection that they would be without any feeling of temptation or sin — seeking to become, in effect, logs and stones.

The monks and scholastics had the same idea about their saints — as though they had been senseless blocks without any feelings or emotions. The virgin Mary felt deep grief and anguish when she could not find her son (Luke 2:48). David complains throughout the Psalms that he is nearly swallowed up by the overwhelming weight of his temptations and sins. Paul also laments that he faces conflicts on the outside and fears within, and that in his flesh he serves the law of sin (Romans 7). He speaks of his constant anxiety for all the churches, and says that God showed him great mercy by sparing Epaphroditus from death — so that Paul would not have sorrow upon sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:5). The

saints of the papists, therefore, are like the ideal wise men of the Stoics — figures that never actually existed anywhere in the world. And through this foolish and diabolical idea, which arose from ignorance of Paul's teaching, the scholastics drove both themselves and countless others into terrible despair.

When I was a monk, I often wished with all my heart that I could see the life and conduct of some saint or holy man. But the saint I imagined was someone living alone in the wilderness, fasting from food and drink, surviving on roots and cold water. I had learned this notion of monstrous saints not only from the books of the scholastics but also from the writings of the early fathers. Jerome writes in one place: 'Concerning food and drink I say nothing, since it is already excess if even the weak and sick use cold water or eat anything boiled.' But now in the light of the Gospel we can clearly see who Christ and His apostles actually call saints: not those who live a solitary and withdrawn life, strictly observing special days, foods, clothing, and similar things, or performing great and extreme outward feats (as we read of many in the lives of the fathers) — but those who, called by the preaching of the Gospel and baptized, believe that they are justified and cleansed by Christ's death. Paul everywhere, writing to Christians, calls them holy, children and heirs of God. Whoever believes in Christ — whether men or women, slave or free — is a saint: not through their own works, but through the works of God which they receive by faith — His word, His sacraments, Christ's suffering, His death, resurrection, victory, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. In short, they are saints through a holiness they freely receive, not through a holiness they have earned by their own effort, good works, and merits.

So ministers of the word, civil magistrates, parents, children, masters, servants — all are true saints, if first and above all they are assured that Christ is their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and if second, each person does his duty in his calling according to God's word and does not obey the flesh but represses its desires through the Spirit. Not everyone has equal strength to resist temptation, and many weaknesses and failures are visible in most people — but this does not destroy their holiness, as long as their sins arise not from stubborn willfulness but only from fragility and weakness. For the godly, as I said before, do feel the flesh's desires — but they resist them so as not to carry them out. And if they do sometimes fall into sin carelessly, they can still obtain forgiveness — if by faith in Christ they are lifted up again by Him, who does not want us to drive away the straying and lost sheep but to seek them out and bring them back. God forbid, then, that I should immediately judge as unholy those who are weak in faith and in conduct, when I see that they love and honor God's word, come to the Lord's Table, and so on. For these God has received and counts as righteous through the forgiveness of sins — before Him they stand or fall.

I therefore give thanks to God with great joy that He has given me abundantly and beyond all measure what I so earnestly longed for when I was a monk — for He has granted me to see not one but many saints, an endless number of true saints: not the kind the scholastics invented, but the kind Christ Himself and His apostles describe. I am assured that I myself am among their number. For I am baptized, and I believe that Christ my Lord has by His death redeemed and delivered me from all my sins, and has given me eternal righteousness and holiness. And let anyone be held ac-

cursed who will not give Christ this honor — to believe that through His death, His word, and all He has done, a person is justified and sanctified.

Let us therefore abandon that foolish and wrong idea about who is called a saint — an idea we held in the time of popery and ignorance, when we thought sainthood applied only to those in heaven and on earth only to hermits and monks who performed certain extraordinary feats. Let us learn from holy Scripture that all who faithfully believe in Christ are saints. The world greatly admires the holiness of Benedict, Gregory, Bernard, Francis, and those like them, because it hears that they performed outwardly impressive and unusual works by worldly standards. But Hilary, Cyril, Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, and others were saints as well — and they did not live so strict and austere a life. They moved about among people, ate normal food, drank wine, wore decent and respectable clothing — in most ways of daily life there was little outward difference between them and other upright men. And yet they were far superior to the others. These men taught the doctrine and faith of Christ sincerely and purely, without superstition; they resisted heretics; they cleared the church of countless errors; their company and friendship were a comfort to many, especially to the afflicted and troubled, whom they lifted up and comforted through the word of God. They did not withdraw from human society but carried out their calling right where people gathered most. The others, by contrast, not only taught many things contrary to the faith, but were themselves the originators and inventors of many superstitions, errors, abominable ceremonies, and wicked forms of worship. Therefore, except for those who at the

hour of death laid hold of Christ and placed their whole trust in His death and victory — their strict and arduous way of life availed them nothing.

All of this makes sufficiently clear who the true saints actually are, and what kind of life is rightly called holy. It is not the life of those who hide away in caves and dens, who starve their bodies with fasting, wear hair garments, and do similar things — believing that through these acts they will receive some special reward in heaven above all other Christians. The truly holy life is that of those who are baptized and believe in Christ, who are putting off the old self and his works — though not all at once. For desire and fleshly craving remain in them as long as they live, yet this feeling does them no harm as long as they do not allow it to reign but keep it subdued to the Spirit.

This teaching brings great comfort to godly minds, so that when they feel the arrows of the flesh with which Satan attacks the Spirit, they will not despair. Many in the papacy fell into despair precisely because they believed they were supposed to feel no fleshly desire whatsoever — while Jerome, Gregory, Benedict, Bernard, and others (held up by monks as perfect examples of chastity and all Christian virtue) could never reach the point of feeling no desire or craving of the flesh. They felt it — and felt it strongly. They acknowledge and openly confess this in various places in their own writings.

We therefore rightly confess in the articles of our faith that we believe there is a holy church. For it is invisible, dwelling in spirit in a place beyond reach — and so its holiness cannot be seen, because God hides and covers it with infirmities, sins, errors, various kinds of cross-bearing, and offenses. By the judgment of reason it

seems to be nowhere. Those ignorant of this, when they see the weaknesses and sins of those who are baptized, have the word, and believe it, are immediately offended and conclude that these people do not belong to the church. Meanwhile they imagine that hermits, monks, and similar shaved-headed figures are the church — people who honor God with their lips but worship Him in vain, because they follow not God's word but the traditions and commandments of men, and teach others to do the same. Because these people perform certain unusual and impressive works that fleshly reason admires and esteems highly, they are judged to be the only true saints and the only real church. In doing so, people completely reverse and invert this article of faith — 'I believe there is a holy church' — replacing the words 'I believe' with 'I see.' These human inventions of righteousness and holiness are nothing but a kind of spiritual witchcraft that blinds people's eyes and minds and draws them away from the knowledge of true holiness.

But we teach this: the church has no spot or wrinkle but is holy — through faith in Christ Jesus alone. She is also holy in life and conduct by abstaining from the desires of the flesh and practicing spiritual works — yet not in such a way that she is free from all evil desires or purged of every wrong opinion and error. For the church always confesses her sins and prays for the pardon of her faults. She also believes in the forgiveness of sins. The saints therefore do sin, fall, and even err — but through weakness, not because they would willingly deny Christ or forsake the Gospel. And so they have the forgiveness of sins. If through weakness they err also in doctrine, that too is pardoned — for in the end they acknowledge their error and rest solely on the truth and the grace of God offered

in Christ, as Jerome, Gregory, Bernard, and others did. Let Christians strive, then, to avoid the works of the flesh — the desires of the flesh, however, they cannot avoid.

It is in fact very good for the godly to feel the unclean desires of the flesh, lest they become puffed up with some vain and wicked confidence in the righteousness of their own works, as though God accepted them for those works. The monks, inflated with exactly this confidence in their own righteousness, imagined themselves so holy that they sold their righteousness and holiness to others — even while their own hearts convicted them of uncleanness. This is how poisonous and deadly it is for a person to trust in his own righteousness and to imagine himself clean. The godly, because they feel their own heart's uncleanness, cannot place their trust in their own righteousness. That feeling keeps them bowed down and humbled, so that they cannot lean on their own good works but are driven to flee to Christ their mercy seat and only help — whose flesh is not corrupt and sinful but most pure and holy, given for the life of the world. In Him they find a complete and perfect righteousness. They continue therefore in humility — not the fake and monkish variety, but genuine and unfeigned humility, because of the uncleanness that still remains in their flesh. If God were to judge them strictly for it, they would be found guilty of eternal death. But because they do not exalt themselves proudly against God, but with broken and contrite hearts humbly acknowledge their sins and rest entirely on the grace of the Mediator Christ — coming into God's presence and asking that their sins be forgiven for Christ's sake — God spreads over them an infinite heaven of grace and does not count their sins against them, for Christ's sake.

I say this so that we may be on guard against the dangerous errors of the papists concerning holiness of life — errors in which our minds were so deeply entangled that we could barely free ourselves from them without great struggle. Work diligently, then, to distinguish and rightly judge between true righteousness and holiness on the one hand and mere hypocrisy on the other. Then you will see Christ's kingdom with different eyes than the fleshly ones — with spiritual eyes — and will rightly recognize as true saints those who are baptized and believe in Christ, and who in the same faith by which they are justified and their sins both past and present are forgiven, also abstain from the desires of the flesh. Yet they are not fully freed from those desires — for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit. Nevertheless, these unclean and rebellious cravings remain in them for this purpose: that they might be humbled, and being humbled, might taste the sweetness of Christ's grace and blessing. So these remaining unclean desires and sins do not hinder the godly at all — they actually advance them. For the more they feel their weaknesses and sins, the more earnestly they flee to Christ the throne of grace and the more urgently they cry out for His help — asking Him to cover them with His righteousness, to strengthen their faith, and to fill them with His Holy Spirit, by whose gracious leading they may overcome the desires of the flesh, so that those desires do not rule and reign over them but are kept subject. In this way true Christians are continually wrestling with sin — and yet in wrestling they are not overcome but win the victory.

I have said all this so that you may understand, not from human imagination but from the word of God, who the true saints actually are. We see how greatly Christian teaching helps to lift up

and comfort weak consciences — it does not deal with religious habits, tonsures, monastic vows, brotherhoods, and similar trifles, but with weighty and serious matters: how we overcome the flesh, sin, death, and the devil. This teaching is unknown to all who pursue righteousness through works and trust in their own merits — and so it is impossible for them to guide even one poor, wandering, and lost conscience back to the right path, or to bring peace and comfort to a conscience weighed down by grief, terror, or despair.

Verse 19. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, etc.

Paul does not list every single work of the flesh — he uses a specific list to represent the broader category. He begins with various kinds of sexual sins: adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, and so on. Now, not only sexual desire is a work of the flesh, as the papists imagined — who also called marriage a work of the flesh (so chaste and holy were these men!), even though God Himself instituted marriage, and they themselves counted it among their sacraments. As I said before, Paul also numbers among the works of the flesh: idolatry, sorcery, hatred, and the other sins that follow in the list. This passage alone is enough to make clear what Paul means by 'the flesh.' These terms are well known enough that they need no further explanation.

Idolatry

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All the most elevated religious practices, all the holiness and intense devotion of those who reject Christ the Mediator and worship God apart from His word and commandment — these are nothing but plain idolatry. In the papacy it was counted a supremely holy and spiritual act when monks, shut away in their cells, pondered and meditated on God or His works — when they burned with the most earnest devotion, knelt down, prayed, and were so transported by the contemplation of heavenly things that they wept for joy. There was no thought of women or any other earthly thing — only of God the Creator and His wonderful works. And yet this most spiritual act (as reason evaluates it) is, according to Paul, a work of the flesh and plain idolatry. Any religion in which God is worshipped apart from His word and commandment is therefore idolatry. And the more holy and spiritual it appears on the outside, the more dangerous and destructive it is — for it turns people away from faith in Christ and leads them to trust in their own strength, works, and righteousness. The religion of the Anabaptists today is exactly this kind — though they are by now revealing themselves increasingly to be devil-possessed, seditious, and violent men.

The fasting, the hair shirts, the holy works, the strict rule, and the whole way of life of the Carthusian monks — whose order is the strictest and most demanding of all — are therefore works of the flesh, yes, outright idolatry. They imagine themselves to be saints saved not by Christ (whom they fear as a harsh and terrible judge) but by observing their monastic rules and orders. They do think about God, Christ, and heavenly things — but according to their own reason and not according to God's word. They think their clothing, their manner of life, and their whole conduct are holy and pleasing to Christ — and they hope not only to appease Him through this strictness of life but to be rewarded by Him for their good deeds and righteousness. Their most spiritual thoughts, therefore (as they imagine them to be), are not only thoroughly fleshly but thoroughly wicked — for they seek to wipe away their sins and earn grace and eternal life by trusting in their own righteousness, rejecting and despising the word, faith, and Christ. All worship, religious service, and religion without Christ is therefore idolatry and the service of idols. In Christ alone is the Father well pleased: whoever hears Him and does what He has commanded is beloved because of the Beloved. He commands us to believe His word and to be baptized — not to invent new forms of worship and service to God.

I have said before that the works of the flesh are obvious — adultery, sexual immorality, and so on are things all people recognize. Idolatry, however, has such an impressive and spiritual appearance that very few — only the faithful — can see it for the work of the flesh it truly is. A monk who lives chastely, fasts, prays, or says Mass is so far from thinking of himself as an idolater or from imagining he is doing any work of the flesh, that he is utterly con-

vinced he is led and governed by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, thinking, speaking, and doing only spiritual things, offering God the most acceptable service imaginable. No one today can persuade the papists that their Mass is a great blasphemy against God and an act of idolatry — indeed one of the most horrible acts of idolatry in the church since the apostles' time. They are blind and stubborn, and so they judge God's matters exactly backward: they think idolatry is true worship of God and faith is idolatry. But we who believe in Christ and know His mind are able to judge and discern all things, and cannot truly and before God be judged by any person.

It is clear from this that Paul uses the word 'flesh' to mean everything in a human being, encompassing all three faculties of the soul: the desiring will, the aggressive will, and the understanding. The works of the desiring will are adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, and similar things. The works of the aggressive will are quarreling, disputes, murder, and similar things. The works of the understanding or reason are errors, false religion, superstition, idolatry, heresy — that is, destructive sects and the like. It is very important for us to know this, because this word 'flesh' has been so obscured in the entire papal kingdom that they took 'the works of the flesh' to mean nothing but the fulfillment of sexual desire — and because of this they could not possibly understand Paul. But here we see plainly that Paul counts idolatry and heresy among the works of the flesh — the very things that reason, as I said before, considers the highest virtues: wisdom, religion, holiness, and righteousness. Paul calls this in Colossians 2 the 'religion of angels.' But however holy and spiritual it may appear, it is nothing but a work of the flesh — an abomination and idolatry against the

Gospel, against faith, and against the true worship of God. The faithful can see this, for they have spiritual eyes — but those who pursue righteousness through works judge exactly the opposite. A monk cannot be persuaded that his vows are works of the flesh. So the Muslim believes nothing less than that his Quran, his ritual washings, and the other ceremonies he observes are works of the flesh.

Witchcraft

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I have spoken about sorcery before in chapter 3. This practice was very common in our time before the light and truth of the Gospel came to shine. When I was a child there were many witches and sorcerers who cast spells on livestock and people, especially children, and caused great harm in other ways as well. But now in the light of the Gospel these things are not heard of nearly so often, for the Gospel drives the devil from his stronghold along with all his deceptions. Now, however, he bewitches people in a far more terrible way — through spiritual sorcery and witchcraft.

Paul counts sorcery among the works of the flesh — even though everyone knows it is not a work of sexual desire, but rather a form of idolatry. Sorcery makes a covenant with the devil; superstition or idolatry makes a covenant with God — not the true God, but a fabricated one. Idolatry is therefore in essence a spiritual form of sorcery. Just as witches cast spells on animals and people, so idolaters — that is, all who seek to justify themselves — try to cast a spell on God, shaping Him into the kind of God they imagine. The God they imagine is one who will justify them not by pure grace and mercy through faith in Christ, but based on their self-invented worship and works of their own choosing, rewarding those things with righteousness and eternal life. But in trying to bewitch

God, they end up bewitching themselves. For if they persist in this false conception of God, they will die in their idolatry and be condemned. The works of the flesh are for the most part well known, and so they need no further explanation.

Sects

By 'sects' Paul means here not the divisions and quarrels that arise in households or civil society over worldly and material matters, but those that arise in the church over doctrine, faith, and works. Heresies — that is, sects — have always existed in the church, as we have noted in various places. Yet the Pope is the chief heretic and the leader of all heretics, for he has flooded the world with a vast torrent of endless sects and errors. What harmony and unity was there among such a vast variety of monks and religious orders? Not one kind or group of them could agree with another, for each measured its holiness by how strictly it observed its own rule. This is why the Carthusian insists on being considered holier than the Franciscan, and so on down the line. There is therefore no unity of Spirit or harmony of minds in the papal church — only great discord. There is no agreement in their doctrine, faith, religion, or worship — everything is in conflict and contradiction. Among Christians, by contrast, the word, faith, religion, sacraments, worship, Christ, God, heart, soul, mind, and understanding are all one and shared in common by all. And as for outward life, the diversity of callings, ranks, and conditions does not hinder this spiritual unity in the least, as I have said before. Those who have this unity of the Spirit are able to judge clearly

about all sects — something others cannot understand. Indeed, no theologian in the papacy understood that Paul in this passage condemns the worship, religion, celibacy, upright outward conduct, and holy-seeming way of life of all papists, sectarians, and schismatics alike. They all assumed he was speaking only about the gross idolatry and heresies of pagans and Muslims who openly blaspheme the name of Christ.

Drunkenness, Gluttony

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Paul does not say that eating and drinking are works of the flesh — he says drunkenness and gluttony are, which of all vices are the most widespread today. Those who give themselves to this brutish excess and self-indulgence should know that they are not spiritual — however much they boast of being so. They are following the flesh and carrying out its filthy works. Against them this terrible sentence is therefore pronounced: they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul wants Christians to flee drunkenness and overeating, living soberly and moderately without any excess — lest by pampering the flesh they stir up sensual desire. For after overindulgence in food and drink, the flesh habitually grows restless and flares up with unruly desire. But it is not enough merely to restrain the excess and desire that follow drunkenness and overeating — the flesh must also be subdued and kept under even when it is at its most sober and self-controlled, so that it does not carry out its cravings. For it often happens that those who are most temperate are the most intensely tempted — as Jerome writes of himself: 'My face was pale with fasting, and my mind was inflamed with fleshly desires in my cold body — and although my flesh was already half dead, the flames of unclean lust burned within me.' I myself had the same experience when I was a monk.

The heat of unclean desire is not quenched by fasting alone — we must also be helped by the Spirit, through meditating on God's word, faith, and prayer. Fasting may dampen the grosser surges of fleshly desire, but the deeper cravings of the flesh are overcome not by abstaining from food and drink, but only by meditating on God's word and calling on Christ.

Verse 21. And things like these.

For it is impossible to list all the works of the flesh.

Verse 21. Of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This is a very hard and terrible verdict — but entirely necessary, directed against false Christians and careless hypocrites who boast of the Gospel, faith, and the Spirit, yet live in complete complacency and carry out the works of the flesh. Heretics in particular, who are full of what they imagine to be spiritual insights, are in fact possessed by the devil and thoroughly fleshly — carrying out and fulfilling the desires of the flesh with the full force of the soul. It was therefore essential that the apostle pronounce such a grave and terrifying verdict against these reckless despisers and stubborn hypocrites — namely, that all who do the works of the flesh Paul has listed will not inherit the kingdom of God — so that at least some of them, alarmed by this severe sentence, might begin to fight against the works of the flesh through the Spirit and not carry them out.

Verse 22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The apostle does not call these 'works of the Spirit,' as he called the other things 'works of the flesh' — he honors these Christian virtues with a nobler title, calling them the fruits of the Spirit. For they bring with them the most excellent results and blessings: those who have them give glory to God, and through them they draw and invite others to embrace the doctrine and faith of Christ.

Love

It would have been sufficient to say simply 'love' and nothing more — for love encompasses all the fruits of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul attributes to love every good fruit produced in the Spirit, saying: 'Love is patient, love is kind,' and so on. Yet here he places love by itself in the first position among the other fruits of the Spirit — to remind Christians that above all they must love one another, giving honor to each other (Romans 12:10), each regarding others as better than himself and serving one another — because they have Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and because of the word, baptism, and all the other gifts God gives to Christians.

Joy

Joy is the voice of the Bridegroom and the Bride — the sweet thoughts of Christ, healthy encouragement, joyful songs and psalms, praises and thanksgivings, by which the godly instruct, stir up, and refresh one another. God does not love heaviness and gloom of spirit — He hates grim and joyless teaching, dark and sorrowful thoughts, and He loves cheerful hearts. He sent His Son precisely not to weigh us down with grief and sorrow, but to fill our souls with joy in Him. For this reason the prophets, the apostles, and Christ Himself do not merely suggest but command us to rejoice and be glad (Zechariah 9): 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you.' The Psalms repeatedly say: 'Be joyful in the Lord.' Paul says: 'Rejoice in the Lord always.' And Christ says: 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Where this spiritual joy is present, the heart inwardly rejoices through faith in Christ, fully assured that He is our Savior and our High Priest — and outwardly this joy expresses itself in words and gestures. The faithful also rejoice when they see the Gospel spreading, many being won to the faith, and the kingdom of Christ expanding.

Peace

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You Christians may be peaceable and quiet toward both God and other people — not contentious, not hostile toward one another, but bearing one another's burdens through patience and perseverance, without which peace cannot last. For this reason Paul places patience immediately after peace.

Long Suffering or Perseverance

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By this a person not only endures adversity, injury, insult, and similar things, but also patiently waits and hopes for the correction of those who have wronged him. When the devil cannot overcome those he is tempting by brute force, he tries to wear them down through long persistence. He knows we are earthen vessels that cannot indefinitely hold up under repeated violent strikes — and so he overcomes many simply by drawing out the temptation. To defeat these relentless assaults we must use patient endurance — endurance that waits not only for those who wrong us to change, but also for the end of those temptations the devil raises against us.

Gentleness

Gentleness is when a person is kind and agreeable in his conduct and his entire way of life. Those who would be true followers of the Gospel must not be sharp and harsh — they must be gentle, mild, courteous, and pleasant in speech, drawing others to enjoy their company. They must be able to overlook other people's faults, or at least interpret them charitably. They must be willing to yield and give way to others, content to bear with those who are difficult and stubborn — as even the pagans said: 'You should know the faults of your friend, but you should not hate him for them.' Such was our Savior Christ, as the Gospel everywhere shows. It is written of Peter that he wept whenever he remembered the sweet gentleness Christ showed in His daily conduct. It is an outstanding virtue, and it is necessary in every kind of life.

Goodness

Goodness is when a person willingly helps others in their need — by giving, lending, and other such acts.

Faith

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When Paul lists faithfulness here among the fruits of the Spirit, it is plain that he is not speaking of faith in Christ but of the faithfulness and reliability that one person shows toward another. As he says in 1 Corinthians 13, love believes all things. The person who has this faithfulness is therefore not suspicious — he is gentle, and he interprets everything in the best possible light. Even when he is deceived and finds himself taken advantage of, his patience and goodwill are such that he lets it go. In short, he is ready to trust everyone — though he does not put blind confidence in everyone. Where this virtue is missing, people are suspicious, contrary, stubborn, and harsh — they will neither believe anyone nor give way to anyone. They can tolerate nothing. Whatever a person says or does, however well-intentioned, they find fault with it and slander it — so that no one who fails to serve their mood can ever please them. It becomes impossible for them to maintain love, friendship, harmony, or peace with others. And if these virtues are removed, what is life but biting and devouring one another? Faithfulness in this passage, then, is the willingness to take others at their word in the ordinary matters of daily life. For what kind of life would we have in this world if no one trusted anyone else?

Meekness

Meekness is when a person is not easily provoked or stirred to anger. There are endless occasions in this life that provoke people to anger, but the godly overcome them through meekness.

Temperance, Chastity, or Continence

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Self-control is a sobriety and modesty that extends to a person's entire way of life — a virtue Paul sets against the works of the flesh. He therefore wants Christians to live soberly and chastely: not committing adultery, not engaging in sexual immorality, not living sensuously. If they cannot live a celibate life, he wants them to marry. He also wants them to avoid quarreling and fighting, to stay away from drunkenness and overindulgence, and to abstain from all these things. Chastity and self-control encompass all of this. Jerome limited this to virginity alone, as though married people could not be chaste, or as though the apostle was writing only to virgins. But in Titus 1 and 2 Paul also urges bishops, younger women, and married couples — both husbands and wives — to be chaste and pure.

Verse 23. Against such things there is no law.

The law does exist — but it is not against such people, as Paul says elsewhere: 'The law is not made for a righteous person.' The righteous person lives in such a way that he has no need of the law to admonish or compel him — without any legal pressure he willingly does what the law requires. The law therefore cannot accuse

or condemn those who believe in Christ. The law does trouble and terrify our consciences — but Christ, grasped by faith, conquers it along with all its terrors and threats. For such people the law is therefore completely set aside and has no power to accuse them, because they voluntarily do what the law demands. They have received the Holy Spirit through faith, who will not allow them to sit idle. Even when the flesh resists, they walk by the Spirit. A Christian fulfills the law inwardly through faith — for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes — and outwardly through works and through the forgiveness of sins. But those who carry out the works and desires of the flesh, the law accuses and condemns — both in this life and spiritually.

Verse 24. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

This entire passage about works shows that true believers are not hypocrites. Let no one deceive himself. Whoever belongs to Christ, he says, has crucified the flesh with all its vices and desires. For the saints, since they have not yet completely put off their corrupt and sinful flesh, are inclined toward sin and do not fear or love God as perfectly as they should. They are also provoked by anger, envy, impatience, unclean desires, and similar impulses — but they do not carry these out. For, as Paul says here, they crucify the flesh with all its passions and desires. They do this not only by restraining the flesh's unruliness through fasting and other disciplines, but also — as Paul said earlier — by walking according to the Spirit: meaning, when they are sobered by God's warnings of severe punishment for sin and are afraid to sin; and when, armed with God's word, faith, and prayer, they do not obey the flesh's desires.

When they resist the flesh in this way, they nail it to the cross along with its passions and desires — so that although the flesh is still alive, it cannot do what it wants, because it is bound hand and foot and firmly nailed to the cross. The faithful, then, as long as they live here, are crucifying the flesh — that is, they feel its desires, but they do not obey them. Armed with God's armor — faith, hope, and the sword of the Spirit — they resist the flesh, and with these spiritual nails they fasten it to the cross, forcing it to remain subject to the Spirit. When they die, they put the flesh off entirely. And when they rise again from death to life, they will have a pure and uncorrupted flesh — without any passions or desires.

If We Live in the Spirit, Let Us Also Walk in the Spirit

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Earlier in this chapter, Paul listed heresy and envy among the works of the flesh and declared that those who practice them will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now he seems to circle back and reprove those who provoke and envy one another all over again. Why does he do this? Was once not enough? He does it deliberately, because he wants to attack the destructive vice of vainglory — the root cause of all the trouble in the Galatian churches and one of the most persistent enemies the church of Christ has ever faced. In his letter to Titus, he said that a proud man should never be ordained as a bishop. Pride, as Augustine rightly said, is the mother of all heresies — indeed, the source of all sin and disorder — and both sacred and secular history bear this out.

Vainglory and arrogance have always been a widespread poison in the world, something even pagan poets and historians condemned with force. In any village you can find someone who wants to be regarded as wiser and more important than everyone else. But those most infected with this disease are the ones who take pride in their reputation for learning and wisdom. No one in that

position wants to yield to another, as the saying goes: you will rarely find a man willing to let someone else have the credit for intelligence and skill — because being the one people point to and say 'that's him' is a prize too sweet to give up. This vice is not as destructive in ordinary private citizens, or even in civil rulers, as it is in those who hold responsibility in the church. Yet even in civil government — especially among powerful leaders — it not only tears apart communities but overturns whole kingdoms and empires, as both Scripture and secular history demonstrate.

But when this poison seeps into the church — into the spiritual kingdom — its harm is beyond description. In the world, people compete over learning, talent, beauty, wealth, or political power. In the church, the contest is over salvation or damnation, eternal life or eternal death. That is why Paul urges ministers of the word so earnestly to flee this vice: 'If we live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit.' His point is this: if it is truly the Spirit who gives us life, then let us also move forward and walk according to that same Spirit. Where the Spirit is present, He transforms people and produces new impulses in them — those who were once vainglorious, wrathful, and envious become humble, gentle, and patient. Such people do not seek their own glory but God's; they do not provoke or envy one another but give way to each other and compete only in showing honor. Those who chase glory and envy one another may boast all they like about living in the Spirit — but they are deceiving themselves, following the flesh and doing its works, and their judgment has already been declared: they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Nothing is more dangerous to the church than this vice, and nothing is more common. Whenever God sends workers into His harvest, Satan immediately raises up his own ministers alongside them — men who will not, under any circumstances, accept being counted inferior to those genuinely called by God. Conflict breaks out at once. The wicked refuse to yield so much as a hair's breadth to the godly, convinced they surpass them in intelligence, learning, godliness, spiritual depth, and every other virtue. The godly, for their part, must not yield to the wicked either — not when the doctrine of faith is at stake. What makes Satan's ministers so dangerous is their ability to appear outwardly charitable, humble, and peace-loving — full of the Spirit's fruits — while insisting that they seek nothing but God's glory and the salvation of souls. In reality they are driven entirely by vainglory, doing everything for the praise and esteem of men. They view the ministry of the word as an instrument for building a reputation. And so they inevitably become authors of dissension and sects.

The vainglory of the false apostles was the direct cause of the turmoil in the Galatian churches and the reason those churches turned away from Paul. Suppressing that destructive vice is one of the chief purposes of this chapter — and in fact, this very crisis gave Paul the occasion to write the entire letter. Had he not written it, all his labor preaching the Gospel among the Galatians would have come to nothing. In his absence, the false apostles — men who carried great outward authority — had taken control of Galatia. Beyond their apparent zeal for Christ's glory and the Galatians' salvation, they claimed to have been personally with the original apostles and to follow their teaching directly. They said Paul had never seen Christ in the flesh, had never truly been

among the apostles, and therefore deserved no authority — his teaching should be rejected, and theirs accepted as the true and genuine Gospel. By these means they threw the Galatian churches into confusion and stirred up envy and rivalry among the believers. This was clear proof that neither the teachers nor their hearers were walking in the Spirit — they were following the flesh and fulfilling its works, and in doing so they had lost the true doctrine, faith, Christ, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and had sunk lower than the pagans they had left behind.

Paul was not only attacking the false apostles who troubled the Galatian churches in his own day. By the Spirit he also foresaw that an endless succession of such people would arise until the end of the world — men infected with this destructive vice who would push their way into the church, boasting of the Spirit and heavenly doctrine, and under that pretense would overthrow true doctrine and faith. We have seen many such people in our own time, forcing their way into the ministry of the word and through this hypocrisy gaining a reputation as great teachers and pillars of the Gospel, as men who lived and walked in the Spirit. But because their glory rested in human opinion rather than in God, it could not last. In keeping with Paul's prophecy, it turned to their own disgrace, and their end was destruction. For the wicked will not stand in judgment but will be swept away like chaff scattered by the wind.

The same judgment awaits all who preach the Gospel for personal gain rather than for the glory of Jesus Christ. The Gospel was not given to us so that ministers might win praise and honor for themselves, or so that people would admire those who preach it. It was given so that the grace and glory of Christ might be proclaimed, and so that the Father might be glorified in the mercy He

offered us in Christ His Son — the Son He gave up for us all, and with whom He has freely given us everything. Therefore the Gospel is a message in which we should seek our own glory least of all. It holds out heavenly and eternal gifts — things we did not produce, did not earn, and do not deserve. It offers them to the unworthy, through the sheer goodness and grace of God. Why, then, would anyone seek praise through it? The one who seeks his own glory in the Gospel speaks on his own authority — and the one who speaks on his own authority is a liar, and there is no truth in him. But the one who seeks the glory of the One who sent him is true, and there is no falsehood in him (John 7).

Paul therefore charges all ministers of the word with urgency: 'If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit.' That means: stay in the truth that has been taught, live in brotherly love and spiritual harmony, preach Christ and God's glory with a simple and honest heart, acknowledge that everything we have comes from Him, do not think more highly of ourselves than of others, and do not raise up sects. To do otherwise is not walking in the right way — it is wandering off the path and setting up a new and crooked one.

This helps us understand why God in His special grace subjects teachers of the Gospel to the cross and every kind of affliction — both for their own good and for the people's. There is no other way to beat back and keep down that beast called vainglory. If nothing followed Gospel preaching but praise and reputation and human esteem, with no persecution and no cross, all who professed it would be poisoned and ruined by vainglory. Jerome said he had seen many who could endure great physical and material hardship but none who could truly despise their own praise. It is almost im-

possible not to swell up when you hear someone speak well of your own virtues. Even Paul, who had the Spirit of Christ, says that a messenger of Satan was given to him to strike him, so that he would not become proud because of the greatness of his revelations. Augustine puts it well: when a minister of the word is praised, he is in danger. When a brother despises or criticizes him, he is also in danger. A person who hears a preacher of the word should honor him for the word's sake — but if the preacher takes pride in that honor, he is in danger. On the other hand, if the preacher is despised, he is in less danger — though the one who despises him is not.

We must therefore honor the great gifts we have received — the preaching of the word and the Sacraments. We must also honor one another, as the saying goes: 'Give preference to one another in showing honor.' But wherever this is done, the flesh immediately senses the praise and grows proud. There is almost no one — not even among the godly — who would not rather be praised than criticized, unless perhaps a person is so firmly grounded that neither praise nor blame can move him. As the woman said to David in 2 Samuel 14: 'My lord the king is like an angel of God, who is disturbed by neither blessing nor cursing.' Paul says the same: 'by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report.' Those who are neither inflated by praise nor crushed by criticism — but simply strive to make known the grace and glory of Christ and to seek the salvation of souls — walk in the right way. Those who grow proud when they hear their own praises, seeking their own glory rather than Christ's — and equally those who, when insulted or slandered, abandon the ministry of the word — do not walk in the right way.

Let everyone, especially those who boast of the Spirit, make sure they are walking rightly. If you are praised, understand that it is not you being praised but Christ, to whom all praise and honor belong. When you teach the word faithfully and live a godly life, those are not your own achievements — they are God's gifts. So it is not you who is being praised but God working in you. When you recognize this, you will walk in the right way: you will not be inflated by vainglory — for what do you have that you did not receive? — but will confess that everything came from God, and you will not be driven by injuries, reproaches, or persecution to abandon your calling.

In His special grace, God covers our glory with shame, reproach, bitter hatred, fierce persecution, insults, and curses from the whole world — along with the contempt and ingratitude of those we live among: common people, citizens, merchants, and nobles alike. The enmity of those close to us, precisely because it is hidden and personal, is more dangerous than the open cruelty of declared enemies. God allows all this so that we will not grow proud of His gifts working through us. This millstone must hang around our neck so that the pestilent poison of vainglory cannot infect us. There may be some on our side who love and honor us for the ministry of the word — but for every one who honors us, a hundred hate and persecute us. These hostile actions, these persecutions, this deep contempt and ingratitude, this private bitterness from those we live among — these things keep us so sobered that we easily forget vainglory.

Rejoicing in the Lord, who is our true glory, we remain in the right path. We recognize that whatever gifts we have are God's gifts, not our own, given for building up the body of Christ — and

so we do not take pride in them. We know that more is required from those who have received much than from those who have received little. We also know that God shows no partiality. A humble craftsman who faithfully uses the gift God has given him pleases God no less than a preacher of the word — for he serves God in the same faith and the same Spirit. We should therefore regard the most ordinary Christians with as much respect as they show us. In this way we will remain free from the poison of vainglory and walk in the Spirit.

Those who crave their own glory — who seek the favor of people, the peace of the world, and the comfort of the flesh, rather than the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls (though they protest that this is all they seek) — cannot help but reveal themselves. They constantly promote their own teaching and methods while denigrating others', all to build a name for themselves. These vainglorious spirits do not rejoice and glory in the Lord. Their confidence and boldness come entirely from being praised by the people. They win people's hearts through cunning and clever tactics, able to play any role in their words, gestures, and writings. But when they are not being praised and admired, they are the most cowardly men in the world — they despise and avoid the cross of Christ and persecution. Yet when they are being praised and lifted up, none are bolder — not Hector, not Achilles — than they.

The flesh is just such a sly and crafty beast — it abandons its proper work, corrupts true doctrine, and tears apart the church's unity for no reason other than this accursed vainglory. It is no wonder, then, that Paul attacks it so sharply, both here and elsewhere — as he did earlier in chapter 4: 'They are zealous for you, but not in a good way; they want to shut you off from me so that

you will be zealous for them.' In other words: they want to discredit me so that they alone can be famous. They are not seeking Christ's glory or your salvation — they are seeking their own glory, my disgrace, and your bondage.

Verse 26. Let us not become boastful.

This kind of boasting is not glorying in God but in human opinion — in the approval and admiration of people. It rests on a false foundation and cannot stand for long. Anyone who praises a person merely as a person is telling a lie, for there is nothing praiseworthy in a human being — everything is worthy of condemnation. As for our own persons, this is our true standing: all have sinned and are deserving of eternal death before God. But the ministry is a different matter. We should not only wish that people honor and respect the ministry of the word — we should work with all our strength to bring this about, because it leads to their salvation. Paul warns the Romans not to give anyone cause for offense, 'so that our service may not be discredited,' and elsewhere, 'so that no fault may be found with our ministry.' So when the ministry is praised, it is not we ourselves who are praised — it is, as the Psalm says, praise offered to God and to His holy name.

Verse 26. Challenging one another, envying one another.

Here Paul describes the natural fruit and outcome of vainglory. Anyone who teaches error or introduces some new doctrine cannot help but provoke others — and when those others refuse to approve and embrace his teaching, he immediately begins to hate them with fierce bitterness. We see this today in the deadly hatred the sectarians direct at us, simply because we will not give way to them or affirm their errors. We did not provoke them first, nor did

we spread any false teaching. We simply rebuked certain abuses in the church and faithfully preached the article of justification — and in this we walked in the right order. But they abandoned this article and taught many things contrary to the word of God. When we refused to surrender the truth of the Gospel, we opposed them and condemned their errors. Unable to bear this, they did not merely provoke us without cause — they continue to hate us bitterly to this day, and for no reason other than vainglory. They want to discredit us so that they alone can have authority and influence. They imagine it is a great prize to profess the Gospel, when in the eyes of the world it is the greatest reproach of all.

Chapter 6:1 — Brethren, If a Man Be Overtaken by Any Fault, You Which Are Spiritual Restore Such a One with the Spirit of Meekness

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Anyone who reads these words of the apostle carefully will notice that he is not speaking about errors or offenses against doctrine but about lesser sins — sins a person falls into not willfully or deliberately, but through weakness. That is why he uses such gentle and fatherly language, not calling it an error or a sin, but a fault. He also softens the sin further by adding: 'if anyone is overtaken' — meaning, caught off guard by the devil or by the flesh. Even the word 'man' carries some weight here, quietly diminishing the severity of the offense. As if to say: what is more natural to a human being than to stumble, to be deceived, and to go wrong? Moses says the same in Leviticus: 'They are prone to sin as people do.' This is therefore a statement full of heavenly comfort — one that once delivered me from the brink of despair in a terrible conflict. The saints in this life not only live in the flesh; they sometimes also, through the devil's temptations, give in to the flesh's desires — falling into impatience, envy, anger, doubt, dis-

trust, and similar sins. Satan always attacks on two fronts: he assaults the purity of doctrine through sects and divisions, and he corrupts the soundness of life through daily offenses. So Paul teaches how those who have fallen should be treated — those who are strong should lift them up and restore them in a spirit of gentleness.

Ministers of the word especially need to understand this, so that in their zeal to cut straight to every problem, they do not lose the fatherly and motherly tenderness Paul calls for in those who care for souls. He gave a practical example of this precept in 2 Corinthians 2, where he said that the rebuke administered to the man who had been excommunicated was sufficient, and that the church should now forgive him and comfort him, so he would not be overwhelmed by excessive grief. 'Therefore I urge you,' he says, 'to reaffirm your love for him.' Pastors and ministers should indeed rebuke those who have fallen — but when they see that these people are genuinely sorrowful, they must begin to lift them up, comfort them, and soften the weight of their fault as much as they can, doing so through mercy alone, setting mercy against sin, so that the fallen person is not consumed by unbearable despair. Just as the Holy Spirit is firm and unyielding in defending the doctrine of faith, He is gentle and compassionate in dealing with people's sins when those who committed them are truly repentant.

The papal system, however, has done the exact opposite of what Paul commands — both in teaching and in practice — and this matter is no exception. The pope and his bishops have been tyrants and butchers of consciences. They burdened people repeatedly with new regulations, and for the smallest offense they threatened excommunication. To make their empty threats more effec-

tive, they attached sayings of Pope Gregory to them: 'It is the mark of a good conscience to fear a fault where none exists,' and 'Our censures must be feared, even when unjust and wrongful.' These sayings — introduced into the church by the devil — are what established papal excommunication and the terrifying power of the papacy over the world. There is no virtue in being afraid of a fault where there is none. Roman Satan — who gave you the power to terrify and condemn consciences that were already crushed by your unjust sentences? You should have lifted them up, freed them from false fears, and led them from lies and errors into the truth. Instead you do the opposite — living up to your title of 'the man of sin and son of destruction' — manufacturing guilt where there is none. This is the very craft of Antichrist, by which he built his excommunication and tyranny. Whoever dared to dismiss his unjust sentences was labeled obstinate and wicked — as some princes found, though they acted against their own consciences, for in those dark times they did not yet understand that the pope's curses were empty.

Let those who have been entrusted with the care of souls learn from Paul's instruction how to handle those who have sinned. 'Brothers,' he says, 'if anyone is overtaken in a fault, do not trouble him or increase his sorrow. Do not be harsh or condemning — restore him and raise him up again. Through a spirit of gentleness and meekness, recover what was lost in him through the devil's deception or the flesh's weakness.' The kingdom you have been called to is not a kingdom of terror and gloom, but of confidence, joy, and gladness. So if you see a brother cast down and burdened because of a sin he has committed, run to him — reach out your hand, lift him back up, speak words of comfort, and wrap him in a caring

embrace. Those who are hard-hearted and obstinate, who carry on carelessly in their sins without any sense of guilt — rebuke them sharply. But those who have been overtaken by sin and are genuinely weighed down by grief over what they have done must be lifted up and helped by you who are spiritual — and this must be done in a spirit of gentleness, not in the spirit of harsh judgment. Some have done the opposite: when they should have refreshed a thirsty conscience with sweet comfort, they gave it gall and vinegar, as the Jews gave to Christ on the cross. Ezekiel said of Israel's shepherds that they ruled God's flock with cruelty and harshness — but a brother should comfort a fallen brother with a loving and gentle spirit. The one who has fallen should hear the word of the one who raises him up, and believe it. God does not want the broken to be cast aside — He wants them raised up, as the Psalm says. God has invested far more in them than we ever have, namely, the life and blood of His own Son. We should therefore receive, help, and comfort such people with every kindness and gentleness.

Verse 1. Considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.

This warning is essential for checking the harshness of pastors who show no compassion in lifting up and restoring those who have fallen. As Augustine says: there is no sin another person has committed that you yourself could not commit. We stand on slippery ground — so if we grow proud and neglect our duty, nothing is easier than falling. A wise saying from the Lives of the Fathers captures this well: when a monk was told that one of his brothers had fallen into sexual sin, he said, 'He fell yesterday — and I may fall today.' Paul adds this urgent warning so that pastors will not be harsh and unmerciful toward those who have sinned, or measure their own holiness by comparing themselves to others' fail-

ures. Instead, they should carry a motherly tenderness toward the fallen and think: 'This person has fallen. I may fall even more seriously and more shamefully than he did.' If those who are so quick to judge and condemn would honestly examine their own sins, they would find that the sins of those who have fallen are specks of dust, while their own sins are great beams.

Let the one who stands take care that he does not fall. David was a deeply holy man — full of faith and the Spirit of God, the recipient of extraordinary promises, the doer of great things for the Lord — and yet after so many trials and temptations that God had used to train him, he fell grievously in his old age, overcome by youthful lust. If David fell, why would we presume to trust our own steadiness? Through such examples, God shows us two things: first, our own weakness, so that we will not grow proud but remain afraid; second, His own judgment — that He can tolerate pride least of all, whether directed against Him or against our brothers. Paul therefore says this with good reason: 'Considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.' Those who have been tested by temptation know how necessary this warning is. Those who have never faced such testing do not understand Paul, and so they feel no compassion for those who have fallen — as was plain to see under the papacy, where nothing ruled but tyranny and harshness.

Verse 2. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

This is a gentle commandment, and Paul attaches high praise to it. The law of Christ is the law of love. After Christ redeemed us, renewed us, and made us His church, He gave us no other law than the law of mutual love. In John 13 He says: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.' And to love is not — as the

scholastic theologians imagined — merely to wish others well. It means to bear one another's burdens: to carry what is painful and what you would rather not carry. Christians must therefore have strong shoulders and robust bones, so they can bear the flesh — that is, the weakness of their brothers — for Paul says these are burdens and troubles. Love is gentle, courteous, and patient — not in receiving but in giving. It is compelled to overlook many things and simply carry them. Faithful teachers see many errors and offenses in the church that they are forced to tolerate. In civil life, subjects are never as obedient to the law as they should be — so unless a ruler can look the other way at the right moment, he will never be fit to govern. In a household, many things happen that displease the head of the house. But if we can overlook and bear with our own daily vices and failures, let us bear with others' faults as well — as the saying goes: 'Bear one another's burdens,' and again, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Since every walk of life and every person has its faults, Paul sets before the faithful the law of Christ, urging them to bear one another's burdens. Those who refuse to do this plainly show they understand nothing at all of the law of Christ, which is the law of love — a love that, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, believes all things, hopes all things, and carries the brothers' burdens. This is always subject, however, to the first commandment: those who violate it do not transgress the law of charity — they do not wrong their neighbor, but they wrong Christ and the kingdom He purchased with His own blood. That kingdom is not upheld by the law of love but by the word of God, faith, and the Holy Spirit. The commandment to bear one another's burdens does not apply to those who deny Christ and not only refuse to acknowledge their sin but

actively defend it, nor to those who persist in sin without remorse — these too are partly denying Christ, and such people must be left, so we do not share in their evil. But those who gladly hear the word of God and believe, yet against their will fall into sin, and when corrected not only receive that correction gladly but also detest their sin and strive to change — these are the ones who have been overtaken by sin, and their burdens are the ones Paul commands us to bear. In their case let us not be harsh and merciless. Let us follow the example of Christ, who bears with and forbears such people — so let us bear with and forbear them also. If He does not punish them — though He would be entirely just in doing so — how much less should we.

Verse 3. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Here again Paul exposes the authors of sects and paints them in their true colors: hard-hearted, merciless, without compassion — people who despise the weak and refuse to carry their burdens, who demand strict and exacting compliance in everything (like unreasonable husbands or harsh schoolmasters), who cannot be satisfied with anything except their own way, and who will be your bitter enemies unless you applaud everything they say and do and conform entirely to their preferences. Of all people, they are the most proud, and they dare to claim everything for themselves. That is exactly what Paul says here: they think themselves to be something — meaning, they believe they have the Holy Spirit, that they understand all the mysteries of Scripture, that they cannot err.

Paul is right to say they are nothing — they deceive themselves with foolish confidence in their own wisdom and holiness. They understand nothing of Christ or of the law of Christ. If they did, they would say: 'Brother, you struggle with that fault, and I struggle with another. God has forgiven me ten thousand talents, so I will forgive you a hundred pence.' But because they demand perfect compliance in everything and will not bear the burdens of the weak, their harshness and severity drive many away. People begin to despise, hate, and avoid them — they stop seeking comfort or counsel from them, and they stop listening to their teaching. Pastors, by contrast, should conduct themselves toward those in their care in a way that draws love and respect — not for their personality, but for their office and the Christian virtues that should shine most clearly in those who lead.

Paul has painted an accurate portrait of these harsh and merciless saints: puffed up by their own foolish opinions and empty illusions, they are convinced they possess remarkable knowledge and holiness, while in reality they are nothing and are simply deceiving themselves. It is a clear self-deception when a person convinces himself he is something when he is nothing. Such people are described perfectly in Revelation 3:17: 'You say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.'

Verse 4. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.

Paul continues to expose these proud and vainglorious people. The craving for vainglory is a disgusting and accursed vice — it is the source of every kind of trouble and brings ruin to both communities and consciences. In spiritual matters especially, it is a disease with no cure. While this passage can apply to ordinary life and human conduct, Paul's main concern here is the work of ministry — he is attacking those boastful troublemakers who, with their self-invented opinions, disturb consciences that have been well grounded in the truth.

Those infected with the poison of vainglory have no concern for whether their work — their ministry — is pure, honest, and faithful. Their only goal is the applause of the people. So the false apostles, seeing that Paul had preached the Gospel faithfully to the Galatians and that they could not offer any superior doctrine, began to find fault with what Paul had taught so faithfully and honestly, and to present their own teaching as superior. By this tactic they won the Galatians' favor and turned the Galatians against Paul. The proud and vainglorious consistently combine three vices. First, they crave glory. Second, they are remarkably clever at finding fault with everything others say and do — using this to win people's affection and admiration. Third, once they have built a name for themselves (even on another man's work), they become so bold and aggressive that they dare to do anything. These are destructive and poisonous people, whom I despise with all my heart — for they seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:21).

Paul is speaking against precisely such people here. He is saying: these vainglorious spirits do their work — that is, they preach the Gospel — for the sole purpose of winning praise and status

among people, of being seen as superior teachers beside whom Paul and others pale in comparison. Once they have secured that status, they begin to criticize what others say and do, while lavishly praising their own work. By this tactic they bewitch the minds of the people, who — because they have itching ears — not only love new opinions but actually enjoy watching the teachers they once respected be humiliated and displaced by these flashy newcomers, all because they have grown bored and sated with the word.

This is not how it should be, Paul says. Let every person be faithful in his office. Let him not seek his own glory or depend on people's praise and approval — let his only concern be to do his work well, which means preaching the Gospel purely. If his work is genuine and sound, he can be sure that praise will come — both from God and from the godly. If the ungrateful world does not commend him, let that not move him at all — for he knows that the goal of his ministry is not to glorify himself but to glorify Christ. Armed with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, let him say: I did not begin preaching the Gospel so the world would praise me, and so I will not abandon what I have begun just because the world hates, slanders, or persecutes me. The person who lives this way teaches the word and carries out his office faithfully — without any worldly motive, without chasing glory or gain, without leaning on any person's strength, wisdom, or approval. He does not depend on others' praise, for he has it within himself (2 Timothy 4:5).

The one who truly and faithfully carries out his office does not care what the world says about him. He does not care whether the world praises or criticizes him, because he carries his praise within himself — the testimony of his own conscience and his glory before

God. He can say with Paul: 'This is our reason for boasting, our praise and glory — even the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and sincerity before God, not in worldly wisdom but in God's grace, we have conducted ourselves in this world.' This glory is uncorrupted and lasting, because it does not depend on other people's opinions but on one's own conscience, which bears witness that the word was taught purely, the sacraments administered rightly, and all things done well — and therefore it cannot be discredited or taken away.

The other kind of glory that these proud spirits chase is uncertain and treacherous — they do not carry it within themselves; it lives in the mouths and opinions of other people. So they cannot have the testimony of their own conscience that they have done everything with honesty and sincerity for the sole purpose of advancing God's glory and the salvation of souls. What they actually seek is to become famous through their preaching and to be praised by people. Their glory, their confidence, and their self-assurance are all located before other people — not within themselves, and not before God. The godly do not desire glory in this way. If Paul had needed his praise to come from people rather than from within himself, he would have been driven to despair when he saw cities, regions, and all of Asia turn away from him, and when he saw how many offenses and heresies followed in the wake of his preaching. When Christ stood alone — rejected by the Jews and abandoned by His disciples — He was not truly alone, because the Father was with Him, and He carried joy and glory within Himself (John 16:32).

In the same way, if our confidence, our glory, and our joy depended on the judgment and favor of people, we would die of heartbreak and anguish. Far from holding us worthy of any respect or praise, the papists, the sectarians, and the whole world hate and persecute us bitterly — they would gladly destroy our ministry and wipe out our teaching forever. Before people, then, we have nothing but reproach. Yet we rejoice and glory in the Lord, and so we carry out our office with cheerfulness and faithfulness, knowing that it is acceptable to Him. Doing this, we do not care whether our work pleases or displeases the devil, or whether the world loves us or hates us. Knowing our work is well done and having a clear conscience before God, we press on through honor and dishonor, through good report and evil report (Philippians 4:4). This, Paul says, is what it means to have your rejoicing in yourself (1 Corinthians 6:3).

This warning is urgently needed against the accursed vice of vainglory. The Gospel is a message that brings with it the cross and persecution — both by its own nature and through the devil's hostility. This is why Paul is accustomed to calling it 'the word of the cross' and 'the word of offense' (1 Corinthians 1:18). It does not always have steady and constant disciples. Many people embrace it today and tomorrow, offended by the cross, will fall away and deny it. Those who preach the Gospel in order to win human favor and applause must inevitably perish, and their glory must turn to shame when people stop honoring and praising them. Let all pastors and ministers of the word therefore learn to find their glory and joy within themselves, not in the mouths of other people. If some praise them — as the godly are accustomed to do, since Paul says we live 'by evil report and good report' — let them receive

such praise only as a shadow of true glory, and let them recognize that the substance of glory is the testimony of their own conscience. The one who lives this way proves his own work: he does not seek his own glory but cares only to carry out his office faithfully — to teach the Gospel purely and to show the true use of the sacraments. When he thus proves his own work, he has joy and glory within himself that no one can take from him — it is planted and rooted in his own heart, not in other people's mouths, which Satan can easily turn, so that the mouth that was blessing a moment ago is now full of curses.

So Paul says: if you want glory, seek it where it should be sought — not in other people's mouths but in your own heart. And you find it there by carrying out your office honestly and faithfully. When you do this, the glory you have within yourself will also be followed by praise and commendation from others. But if you base your glory on others rather than on yourself, the shame you carry within will not stay hidden — it will be accompanied by disgrace and confusion before others as well. We have seen this with certain fanatical spirits in our own time who did not prove their own work. Rather than preaching the Gospel purely and simply, they exploited it for human applause — in violation of the second commandment. So after their inward confusion came an outward confusion and shame before all, according to the saying: 'The Lord will not hold guiltless the one who takes His name in vain' (Exodus 20:7). And again: 'Those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed' (1 Samuel 2:30).

But if we seek first God's glory through the ministry of the word, our own glory will surely follow — according to the saying: 'Those who honor Me I will honor.' In the end, let every person

prove his work — let him strive to make his ministry faithful, for this is the primary requirement of ministers of the word (1 Corinthians 4:2). Paul means: let every person work to teach the word purely and faithfully, keeping his eye on nothing except the glory of God and the salvation of souls — and then his work will be faithful and sound, and he will have joy and glory in his own conscience, so that he can say with confidence: 'This teaching and this ministry please God.' And that is true and excellent glory.

This principle applies equally to the faithful in every walk of life. A ruler, a head of household, a servant, a teacher, a student — whoever remains in his vocation and faithfully does what that vocation requires, not busying himself with tasks that belong to someone else's calling, can rightly glory and rejoice within himself. He can say: 'I have done the work of my calling as God appointed it, with as much faithfulness and diligence as I could manage. I know that this work, done in faith and obedience to God, pleases God.' If others speak badly of it, he cares little about that. There will always be those who despise and slander the teaching and lives of the godly — but God has promised to destroy all lying lips and slanderous tongues. So while such people pursue vainglory and try to destroy the godly with lies and slanders, it happens to them exactly as Paul says: 'whose glory is their shame.' And elsewhere: 'Their foolishness will be obvious to everyone.' Who will expose it? God the righteous Judge — He will lay bare their false accusations and slanders, and just as surely He will bring the righteousness of the godly to light like the midday sun, as the Psalm says (Psalm 17).

The phrase 'in himself' — worth noting briefly — must not be understood in a way that excludes God. Rather, every person in whatever godly calling he occupies should know that his work is a divine work — because it is the work of a vocation that carries God's command.

Verse 5. For each one will carry his own load.

This serves as the reason and confirmation of what he said before — so that no one would lean on other people's praise and approval. What he is saying is this: it is sheer madness to seek your glory in others rather than in yourself, because in the agony of death and on the day of final judgment it will profit you nothing that others praised you. Others will not carry your burden — you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and bear your load alone. Your praisers will be of no help to you there. When we die, all those praises will fall silent. On that day, when the Lord judges the secrets of all hearts, the witness of your own conscience will stand either for you or against you — against you if your glory was in others, for you if you had it within yourself, meaning if your conscience bears witness that you faithfully and honestly carried out your ministry or your calling, with your eye on God's glory and the salvation of souls alone. These words — 'each one will carry his own load' — carry great force, and they should sober us so thoroughly that we have no desire for vainglory.

It should also be noted that we are not talking here about justification, where nothing counts but pure grace and forgiveness of sins received through faith alone — where all our works, even our very best works done in accordance with our calling, still need forgiveness of sins. This is a different matter. Paul is not treating forgiveness of sins here but comparing genuine work with hypocriti-

cal work. The point is this: while even a godly pastor's work is not so perfect that it has no need of forgiveness, it is still good and sound when compared to the ministry of a vainglorious person. Our ministry is good and sound because through it we seek God's glory and the salvation of souls. The ministry of these boastful troublemakers is not, because they seek their own praise. Even though no works can quiet the conscience before God, it is still necessary that we be able to say honestly that we have done our work uprightly, faithfully, and according to God's calling — that we have not corrupted the word of God but have taught it purely and honestly. We need this testimony of conscience: that we have carried out our duty faithfully in our office and calling and have lived accordingly. We can therefore rightly take satisfaction in our works to the degree that we know they are commanded by God and that they please Him. For in the final judgment each one will carry his own load, and therefore other people's praise will be of no help or profit to anyone then.

Up to this point Paul has spoken against the most destructive vice of vainglory — a vice so powerful that no one is strong enough to resist it without constant prayer. For who among even the godly is not pleased by his own praises? Only the Holy Spirit can preserve us from being infected by it.

Verse 6. The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

Here Paul addresses the students and hearers of the word, commanding them to provide generously for those who have taught and instructed them. I used to wonder why the apostle was so diligent in commanding the churches to support their teachers. Under the papacy I saw everyone giving lavishly — to build and

maintain grand temples, to increase the revenues and incomes of those assigned to serve in their idolatrous system. As a result, the wealth and prestige of the bishops and clergy grew so great that they came to possess the finest and most productive land everywhere. I therefore thought Paul had issued this command in vain, since the clergy were not merely provided for abundantly but were awash in wealth. If anything, I thought people needed to be urged to hold back their giving rather than encouraged to give more — for I could see that this excessive generosity was only feeding the clergy's greed. But now I understand why there was such abundance before, and why the pastors and ministers of the word go without it now.

In former times, when nothing was taught but errors and corrupt doctrine, the church had such abundance that from Peter's inheritance — Peter, who declared he had neither silver nor gold — and from what they called 'spiritual goods,' the pope had become an emperor, and cardinals and bishops had become kings and princes of the world. But now that the Gospel has been preached and proclaimed, those who embrace it are as wealthy as Christ and His apostles once were. We know by experience, then, how well this command to support and provide for the pastors and ministers of God's word is being followed — the command Paul repeats and presses home here and in so many other places. There is now no city in our acquaintance that genuinely supports and maintains its pastors and preachers. The church's resources were given not to Christ — to whom no one gives anything; He was laid in a manger at birth because there was no room for Him, He had nowhere to lay His head during His ministry, and He died stripped of His clothing, hanging naked on the cross between two thieves — but to

the pope, to fund his abominations, to support his suppression of the Gospel, to promote the doctrines and traditions of men, and to establish idolatry.

Whenever I read Paul's appeals to the churches — urging them either to support their pastors or to contribute to the relief of the poor believers in Judea — I am struck with great amazement and shame that so great an apostle had to labor through so many words to obtain such a simple kindness from the congregations. He devotes two entire chapters of his second letter to treating this matter with the Corinthians. I would be reluctant to shame Wittenberg — which is nothing compared to Corinth — in the way he shamed the Corinthians by having to beg so earnestly for aid to the poor. But this is what happens when the Gospel is preached: not only does no one willingly give anything for the support of ministers or the education of students, but people begin to plunder, steal, and cheat one another by every crafty means. In short, people suddenly seem to shed their humanity and turn into cruel beasts. And yet when the doctrine of demons was being preached, people were extravagant and gave everything freely to those who were deceiving them. The prophets condemn the same sin in the Israelites, who were reluctant to provide for the godly priests and Levites but gave lavishly to the wicked.

We are beginning to understand, then, how necessary Paul's command about supporting ministers of the church truly is. Satan cannot tolerate the light of the Gospel. When he sees it beginning to shine, he rages and tries with all his strength to put it out. He uses two main strategies to do this. First, he employs lying spirits and violent rulers. Second, he uses poverty and starvation. Since he has not yet been able to crush the Gospel in this region — praise

God — by means of heretics and tyrants, he is trying the other approach: by cutting off the financial support of ministers of the word, hoping that when they are driven down by poverty and need they will abandon the ministry, leaving the miserable people without the word of God and allowing them to sink over time into a state no better than wild beasts. Satan advances this terrible scheme through ungodly rulers in the cities and through nobles and landowners in the countryside, who seize church resources that should support Gospel ministers and put them to corrupt uses. 'These goods,' says the prophet Micah, 'were gathered as the wages of a prostitute, and to the wages of a prostitute they will return' (Micah 1:7).

Satan also turns individuals away from the Gospel through sheer overindulgence. When the Gospel is preached diligently day after day, many grow so full of it that they begin to find it distasteful, and they slowly become lazy and resistant toward every form of godly practice. Furthermore, hardly anyone will now raise their children in good learning, let alone in the study of Holy Scripture — instead they are directed entirely toward profitable trades and occupations. All of this is Satan's work, aimed at nothing other than suppressing the Gospel in this land — without the need for any ruler's violence or any heretic's scheming.

Paul's warning to hearers of the Gospel to share all good things with their pastors and teachers is therefore anything but unnecessary. As he says to the Corinthians: 'If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?' (1 Corinthians 9:11). Those who receive spiritual things from their teachers are therefore obligated to provide material things in return. But farmers, townspeople, and nobles today exploit our

teaching as a cover to enrich themselves. In the past, under the pope, there was no one who did not pay something yearly to priests — for masses, requiems, series of memorial masses, and similar nonsense. The begging friars also took their share. The merchandise of Rome and the daily offerings claimed still more. By the Gospel, our countrymen have now been freed from these and countless other such demands. But far from being grateful to God for this freedom, they have gone from being prodigal givers to outright thieves and robbers — unwilling to contribute a single coin to the Gospel or its ministers, or to give anything for the relief of the poor. This is a clear sign that they have lost both the word and faith, and that they have nothing spiritually good in them. It is impossible for those who are genuinely godly to allow their pastors to live in need and poverty. But because these people laugh and celebrate when their pastors suffer hardship, and withhold their support or give it with far less faithfulness than they should — this is plain evidence they are worse than pagans.

But they will soon discover what calamities follow from this ingratitude. They will lose both earthly and spiritual things, for this sin cannot go unpunished. I am convinced that the churches in Galatia, Corinth, and elsewhere were troubled by the false apostles for no other reason than that they had shown little regard for their true pastors and preachers. It is only fitting that whoever refuses to give a penny to God — who offers all good things and eternal life — will end up giving gold to the devil, the source of all evil and eternal death. Whoever will not serve God in small matters — to his own immeasurable benefit — let him serve the devil in great

ones, to his own complete destruction. Now that the light of the Gospel is beginning to shine, we can see plainly what the devil is and what the world is.

When Paul says 'in all his goods,' this does not mean everyone is obligated to give everything they own to their ministers. It means they should support them generously, providing them with what they need to live comfortably.

Verse 7. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.

The apostle presses this matter of supporting and maintaining ministers so urgently that he now adds a threat to go along with his earlier rebuke and encouragement: 'God is not mocked.' With this he cuts to the heart of what our countrymen are doing — they proudly despise our ministry. They treat it as something trivial and beneath them, and some nobles especially try to make their pastors into servants and slaves. If we did not have so godly a prince who loves the truth, they would have driven us out of the region long ago. When pastors ask for what is owed them or complain of going without, the cry goes up: 'The priests are greedy — they always want more, no one can satisfy their insatiable appetite. If they were true believers in the Gospel they would own nothing — like poor men they should follow the poor Christ and endure all hardships.'

Paul issues a terrifying warning to such tyrants and mockers of God — those who so carelessly and arrogantly scorn the struggling preachers while still claiming to be followers of the Gospel and sincere worshipers of God. 'Do not be deceived,' he says: 'God is not mocked' — meaning, He does not allow Himself to be mocked in the persons of His ministers. For He has said: 'Whoever despises

you despises Me.' And He said to Samuel: 'They have not rejected you but Me.' So, mockers, though God may delay His punishment for a time, when He sees the moment He will find you out and punish this contempt for His word and this bitter hatred you carry toward His ministers. You are not deceiving God but yourselves — you will not laugh at God; He will laugh at you (Psalm 2). Our proud nobles, townspeople, and common citizens are unmoved by this frightening warning. But when death draws near, they will discover whether they mocked themselves or us — or rather, not us, but God Himself, as Paul says here. In the meantime, since they dismiss our warnings with insufferable pride, we say these things for our own comfort — to remind ourselves that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, for patience is always innocent and harmless. Furthermore, God will not let His ministers starve. Even when the wealthy are going hungry, He will feed them — and in days of famine they will have enough.

Verse 7. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

All of this serves the purpose of establishing that ministers should be supported and provided for. For my part, I am not fond of interpreting passages like this, since they appear to commend us — and indeed they do. Moreover, dwelling on such things too much before one's hearers can carry a hint of greed. Nevertheless, people must be reminded of it, so they know they owe their pastors both respect and a sufficient living. Our Savior Christ teaches the same in Luke 10: 'Eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.' And Paul says elsewhere: 'Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat from the temple

offerings, and those who regularly serve at the altar share in the offerings of the altar?' So also the Lord has directed that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel.

It is also good for us who serve in the ministry to understand this clearly, so that we can receive the income provided from the church's former resources without a troubled conscience. Even though such resources were accumulated through fraud and deception, God is now — by stripping the Egyptians, that is, the papists, of their goods — redirecting them to a good and holy use among us. This happens not when nobles and landowners seize them for their own benefit, but when they are used to support those who proclaim God's glory and raise up the young in virtue. Let us understand, then, that we may use what the church provides for the necessary support of our lives with a clean conscience — since God has ordained and commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel — so that we can carry out our work all the better. Let no one make a scruple of this, as though it were somehow unlawful to use such resources.

Verse 8. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Paul adds an illustration and an analogy. He takes the general truth about sowing and applies it to the specific matter of supporting and maintaining ministers of the word: 'He who sows in the Spirit' — that is, he who provides for teachers of God's word — does a spiritual work and will reap eternal life. This raises a question: are we then earning eternal life through good works? Paul seems to be saying exactly that here. We dealt with such passages about works and their rewards at length in chapter 5. It is certainly

necessary, following Paul's example, to urge the faithful to good works — that is, to put their faith into action through good works, for if good works do not follow from faith, that is a clear sign the faith is not genuine. So the apostle says: 'He who sows to the flesh' — some understand this as 'in his own flesh' — that is, he who gives nothing to the ministers of God's word and only feeds and looks out for himself (which is the flesh's counsel) — will from the flesh reap corruption, not only in this present life but in the life to come as well. The goods of the wicked will waste away, and in the end they themselves will come to a shameful ruin. Paul wants to stir his hearers to be generous toward their pastors and preachers. But what a sad state of affairs it is that people's perverseness and ingratitude are so great that the churches need this kind of admonition at all.

The Encratites misused this passage to support their wicked position against marriage, interpreting it this way: 'He who sows to the flesh will reap corruption — that is, he who takes a wife will be damned — therefore a wife is a damning thing and marriage is evil, since it involves sowing to the flesh.' These people were so completely lacking in judgment that they could not see what the apostle was actually talking about. I mention this to show how easily the devil, through his ministers, can turn simple people away from the truth. Germany will soon have an endless supply of such people — indeed, it already has a great many — for on one hand it persecutes and kills godly ministers, and on the other it neglects and despises them and allows them to live in severe poverty. Let us arm ourselves against these and similar errors and learn to understand what Scripture is actually saying. Paul is not speaking about marriage here but about supporting the ministers of the church —

something anyone with ordinary common sense can see. And although this support is a material thing, he still calls it 'sowing in the Spirit.' By contrast, when people greedily scrape together everything they can for their own profit, he calls it 'sowing to the flesh.' Those who sow in the Spirit he pronounces blessed — both in this life and in the one to come. Those who sow to the flesh he pronounces under a curse — both in this life and the one to come.

Verse 9. Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up.

As he moves toward closing his letter, Paul shifts from the particular to the general and urges generosity in all good works. He means: let us be generous and giving not only toward ministers of the word but toward all people — and without growing weary. It is easy enough to do good once or twice. What is hard is to keep going without losing heart when those you have helped respond with ingratitude and hostility. So Paul does not only urge us to do good — he urges us not to grow weary of doing good. To motivate us, he adds: 'For in due time we will reap if we do not give up.' In other words: look ahead to the coming harvest — the one that never ends — and then no one's ingratitude or hostile behavior will be able to pull you away from doing good, because at harvest time you will receive an abundant return on your seed. With these warm and encouraging words he urges the faithful to lives of good works.

Verse 10. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This is the summary of his appeal for generous support of ministers of the word and for giving to all who are in need. He means: let us do good while it is day, for when night comes no one can work. People may accomplish many things after the light of truth has been extinguished, but all of it is wasted — they walk in darkness and do not know where they are going, and so their whole life, works, sufferings, and death amount to nothing. With these words he also has the Galatians in mind. He is saying: unless you hold to the sound teaching you received from me, all the good works you perform and all the hardships you endure will profit you nothing — as he said earlier in chapter 3: 'Did you suffer so many things for nothing?' And with a distinctive phrase he calls those who share the fellowship of faith 'the household of faith' — with the ministers of the word foremost among them, and all the rest of the faithful alongside them.

Verse 11. See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

He closes the letter with an encouragement to the faithful and a sharp attack on the false apostles. 'See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand' — he says this to move their hearts and to show his deep, fatherly affection for them. He means: I have never written such a long letter to any other church with my own hand as I have written to you. In his other letters, Paul typically dictated while someone else wrote, and then he added his own greeting and signature at the end — as can be seen in the closing lines of his letters. In these words, I take it, he is making a point about the length of this letter — though others interpret it differently.

Verse 12. Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Earlier Paul cursed the false apostles. Now, essentially repeating the same thing in different words, he accuses them sharply in order to frighten the Galatians and pull them away from these teachers — despite the great authority they seemed to carry. The teachers you have, he says, are guilty on three counts: first, they care nothing for Christ's glory or your souls but only seek their own glory; second, they flee the cross; third, they do not even understand what they teach.

False teachers charged with three such serious failures are rightly to be avoided by everyone. Not all the Galatians heeded Paul's warning, however. And Paul does the false apostles no wrong by attacking them so forcefully — he justly condemns them by his apostolic authority. In the same way, when we call the pope Antichrist and his bishops and clergy an accursed generation, we are not slandering them — we are judging them by God's own authority, in keeping with what was said in chapter 1: 'If we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, he is to be accursed' (Galatians 1:8). For they hate, persecute, and overturn the doctrine of Christ.

Your teachers, Paul says, are empty and boastful — they do not care about Christ's glory or your salvation but seek only their own. Moreover, because they fear the cross, they preach circumcision and a righteousness of outward observance, in order to avoid provoking the Jews to hatred and persecution. So however long and eagerly you listen to them, you are listening to people who make their belly their god, seek their own glory, and avoid the cross.

Worth noting here is the force of the word 'compel.' Circumcision in itself is nothing — but to be compelled to undergo it, to locate righteousness and holiness in it, and to treat it as a sin if it is refused — that is an injury to Christ. I have treated this matter at sufficient length before (Philippians 3:19).

Verse 13. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

Would Paul not be called a heretic for saying this? He is declaring that not only the false apostles but the entire circumcised Jewish people do not keep the law — that those who are circumcised, even in their law-keeping, do not truly keep it. This seems to go against Moses, who says that circumcision is keeping the law, and that to remain uncircumcised is to break the covenant (Genesis 17:10-14). The Jews were circumcised for the very purpose of keeping the law, which commanded that every male child be circumcised on the eighth day. We have treated this thoroughly before and need not repeat it all here. What Paul says here serves to expose the false apostles so that the Galatians will be deterred from following them. He is saying: look — let me show you plainly what kind of teachers you have. First, they are vainglorious men who care only for their own profit and their own stomach. Second, they flee the cross. Third, their entire teaching and practice is a pretense, full of hypocrisy. So even though they observe the law outwardly, in their observing they do not truly observe it. Without the Holy Spirit the law cannot be kept, and the Holy Spirit cannot be received apart from Christ. Where the Holy Spirit does not dwell, an unclean spirit dwells instead — one that despises God and pursues its own gain and glory. Therefore everything such a

person does in regard to the law is sheer hypocrisy and double sin. An unclean heart does not fulfill the law — it only makes an outward show of doing so, and in this it only deepens its own wickedness and self-deception.

This statement deserves careful attention: those who are circumcised do not keep the law — which means, those who are circumcised are not truly circumcised. The same principle applies to other works. Anyone who works, prays, or endures hardship without Christ works, prays, and suffers in vain — for 'whatever is not from faith is sin' (Romans 14:23). It profits a person nothing to be outwardly circumcised, to fast, to pray, or to perform any other work, if inwardly he despises grace, forgiveness of sins, faith, and Christ — puffing himself up with confidence in his own righteousness. These are terrible sins against the first table of the law, and they are followed by other sins against the second table — disobedience, sexual immorality, rage, wrath, hatred, and the rest. Paul is therefore exactly right to say that those who are circumcised do not keep the law — they only pretend to keep it. And this pretense, this hypocrisy, is a double wickedness before God.

What do the false apostles actually want when they push you to be circumcised? Not to make you righteous — though that is what they tell you — but to be able to boast in your flesh. Who would not despise this most poisonous ambition and craving for glory, especially when it is pursued at such terrible cost to people's souls? These are, Paul says, deceitful, shameless, and empty people who serve their own stomachs and hate the cross. Worse still — and this is the worst of all — they compel you to be circumcised by the law, in order to use your body as a trophy for their own reputation, while in the meantime leading your souls toward eternal destruc-

tion. What do you gain before God from this but condemnation? And what do you gain before people but the privilege of letting the false apostles boast that they are your teachers and you their students — while they themselves do not practice what they demand of you? This is how Paul sharply exposes the false apostles.

The phrase 'boast in your flesh' is very pointed. Paul means: these teachers do not have the word of the Spirit — so it is impossible for you to receive the Spirit through their preaching. All they do is exercise your flesh, making you flesh-centered justifiers of yourselves by your own works. Outwardly they observe days, seasons, sacrifices, and other things prescribed by the law — all of it entirely material — and from this you gain nothing but fruitless labor and condemnation. What they gain is the ability to boast that they are your teachers and that they have brought you back from Paul the heretic to their mother, the Synagogue. The papists today do the same, boasting that they draw back to the bosom of their holy mother church those whom they have deceived and seduced. We, by contrast, do not glory in your flesh — we glory concerning your Spirit, because you received the Spirit through our preaching (Galatians 3:2).

Verse 14. But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle closes the argument with deep feeling and with great force of spirit he declares: 'But may it never be!' He means: the carnal glory and ambition of the false apostles is so deadly a poison that I wish it were buried in hell — for it is the ruin of many. Let them glory in the flesh if they choose, and let them perish with their accursed glory. As for me, I want no glory other than the glory of rejoicing in the cross of Christ. He speaks the same

way in Romans 5: 'We also celebrate in our tribulations.' And in 2 Corinthians 12: 'I will boast about my weaknesses.' Here Paul shows what the glory and rejoicing of Christians consists in: to boast and to take pride in tribulations, reproaches, weaknesses, and the rest.

The world does not merely regard Christians as wretched and miserable — it hates, persecutes, condemns, and kills them as the most dangerous plagues upon both the spiritual and civil order, and it does this with what it believes to be genuine zeal, calling them heretics and rebels. But because Christians do not suffer these things for murder, theft, or any other wickedness — but for the love of Christ, whose grace and glory they proclaim — they glory in their sufferings and in the cross of Christ, and they rejoice with the apostles that they have been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Christ. So must we glory today, when the pope and the whole world persecute, condemn, and kill us — because we suffer these things not for evil deeds, as thieves and murderers do, but for Christ our Lord and Savior, whose Gospel we faithfully preach.

Our glory is strengthened and confirmed on two grounds: first, we are certain that our teaching is sound and complete; second, the cross we carry and the suffering we endure is the suffering of Christ. So when the world persecutes and kills us, we have no reason to complain or mourn — we should instead rejoice and be glad. The world judges us to be miserable and cursed. But Christ — who is greater than the world and for whom we suffer — pronounces us blessed and calls us to rejoice: 'Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad.' Our glory is entirely different

from the world's glory, which rejoices not in tribulation, reproach, persecution, and death, but celebrates only power, wealth, peace, honor, wisdom, and its own righteousness. But mourning and confusion are where that glory ends.

The cross of Christ does not refer only to the wooden cross Christ carried on His shoulders and to which He was nailed — it refers more broadly to all the afflictions the faithful suffer, whose sufferings are Christ's sufferings. As 2 Corinthians 1 says: 'The sufferings of Christ are abundant in us.' And again: 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.' The cross of Christ therefore means, in the fullest sense, all the sufferings the church endures for Christ — which Christ Himself confirms when He says, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' Saul was not laying hands on Christ directly, but on His church. Yet whoever touches the church touches the apple of His eye. The head feels more keenly than any other part of the body — we know this from experience: when even the smallest part of the body is hurt, the head immediately shows by the face that it feels the pain. In the same way, Christ our Head takes all our afflictions as His own and suffers with us who are His body.

It is good for us to understand this, so that we are not consumed by grief or driven to despair when we see our enemies cruelly persecuting, excommunicating, and killing us. Like Paul, let us remind ourselves that we should glory in the cross we bear — not for our own sins, but for Christ's sake. When we look only at our own experience of suffering, it is not merely hard but unbearable. But when we can say, 'Your sufferings, O Christ, overflow in us' — or as Psalm 44 says, 'For Your sake we are killed all day long' —

then these sufferings become not only bearable but sweet, in keeping with His own word: 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light' (Matthew 11:30).

It is well known that the hatred and persecution we face today comes for one reason alone: we preach Christ faithfully and purely. If we would deny Him and endorse our opponents' corrupt errors and false religion, they would not only stop hating and persecuting us — they would offer us honor, wealth, and much besides. Since we do suffer these things for Christ's sake, we can truly rejoice and glory with Paul in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ — not in riches, power, or human favor, but in afflictions, weakness, sorrow, outward conflicts, inward terrors, persecution, and every kind of hardship. We therefore trust that Christ will soon say to us what David said to Abiathar the priest: 'I am the cause of all your troubles.' And again: 'Whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye' — meaning, whoever harms you harms Me. For if you were not preaching My word and confessing Me, you would not suffer these things. As He says in John: 'If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you.' But these things have been treated before.

Verse 14. Through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

This is Paul's characteristic way of speaking. 'The world is crucified to me' means: I judge the world to be condemned. 'I am crucified to the world' means: the world judges me to be condemned. So we condemn one another. I regard all the world's doctrine, righteousness, and works as the devil's poison. The world in turn detests my teaching and what I do, and judges me to be a trouble-

maker, a dangerous man, a pestilence, and a heretic. So today the world is crucified to us, and we to the world. We condemn all human traditions regarding masses, religious orders, vows, self-invented worship, works-righteousness, and all the abominations of the pope and other heretics as the devil's filth. They in turn persecute and kill us as destroyers of religion and disturbers of public order.

The monks imagined the world was crucified to them when they entered their monasteries — but in reality, by doing this, they were crucifying Christ, not the world. In fact, they were liberating the world from being crucified, and the world was all the more alive and active in the pride and self-confidence they poured into their so-called religious life. It was therefore a foolish and wicked distortion to apply Paul's words to entering a monastery. He is speaking here of something far higher and more important: that every faithful person recognizes as the wisdom, righteousness, and power of God the very thing the world condemns as the worst folly, wickedness, and weakness. And conversely, what the world regards as the highest religion and service of God, the faithful recognize as nothing but execrable and horrifying blasphemy against God. So the godly condemn the world, and the world condemns the godly. But the godly have the right judgment on their side — for the spiritual person judges all things.

The world's judgment about religion and righteousness before God is therefore as opposite to the godly person's judgment as God is opposite to the devil. Just as God is crucified to the devil and the devil to God — God condemning the devil's doctrine and works (for the Son of God appeared, as John says, to destroy the works of the devil), and the devil destroying and overturning the word and

works of God (since he is a murderer and the father of lies) — so the world condemns the doctrine and life of the godly, calling them the most dangerous heretics and troublers of public peace. And the faithful in turn call the world a child of the devil, who faithfully follows his father's example — being as great a murderer and liar as the devil himself. This is Paul's meaning when he says: 'Through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.' It should be noted that in Scripture 'the world' refers not only to openly wicked people, but also to the very best, wisest, and most outwardly holy people the world has to offer.

Here Paul also takes an indirect shot at the false apostles. He is saying: I utterly despise and reject all glory that does not come through the cross of Christ — it is a cursed thing to me, for the world with all its glory is crucified to me and I to the world. Therefore, accursed are all who glory in your flesh and not in the cross of Christ. By these words Paul is declaring that he hates the world with the perfect hatred that the Holy Spirit inspires — and the world hates him with the perfect hatred of a wicked spirit. There is no possibility of agreement between me and the world, he is saying. So what am I to do? Should I give way and teach what the world wants to hear? No — with bold courage I will set myself against it and despise it and crucify it, just as it despises and crucifies me.

In closing, Paul teaches here how we must fight against Satan — who not only torments our bodies with every kind of affliction but continually wounds our hearts with his fiery arrows, hoping that through sheer persistence, when he cannot overcome us any other way, he may destroy our faith and drag us from the truth and from Christ. The lesson is this: just as we see Paul boldly despising

the world, so we must despise the devil — the world's ruler — together with all his power, tricks, and hellish rages, and trusting in Christ's help, we must triumph over him in this spirit: 'Satan, the more you attack me and try to bring me down, the bolder and more defiant I become against you, and the more I laugh at you.' 'The more you terrify me and try to drive me to despair, the more confidence and boldness I draw — and in the midst of your rage and malice I glory: not in my own strength, but in the power of my Lord and Savior Christ, whose strength is made perfect in weakness. So when I am weak, then I am strong.' By contrast, when Satan sees that his threats and terrors produce real fear, he rejoices, and he presses his attack all the harder against those who are already afraid.

Verse 15. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Paul uses a striking way of speaking when he says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. One might expect him to say that one or the other counts for something, since they are opposites. Instead he denies that either one counts at all. His point is: you need to rise higher than this. Circumcision and uncircumcision are not capable of obtaining righteousness before God. Granted, they are opposites — but that is irrelevant when it comes to Christian righteousness, which is not earthly but heavenly, and therefore does not consist in bodily things. So whether you are circumcised or uncircumcised, it makes no difference — in Christ Jesus, neither one counts for anything.

The Jews were deeply offended to hear that circumcision counted for nothing. They could easily grant that uncircumcision counted for nothing. But they could not bear the same being said

of circumcision — they fought to the death to defend the law and circumcision. The papists today do the same, fiercely defending their traditions regarding eating meat, celibacy, holy days, and the like, and excommunicating and cursing us for teaching that these things count for nothing in Christ Jesus. But Paul says we must have something far more excellent and precious in order to obtain righteousness before God. In Christ Jesus, he says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither celibacy nor marriage, neither eating nor fasting, counts for anything. Food does not make us acceptable to God — we are neither better for abstaining nor worse for eating. All these things — indeed the entire world with all its laws and righteousness — count for nothing toward justification.

Human reason and the wisdom of the flesh cannot grasp this, for it cannot perceive the things of the Spirit of God. It insists that righteousness must consist in outward things. But the word of God teaches us that nothing in the world contributes to righteousness before God except Christ alone — or, as Paul says here, a new creation. Civil laws, human traditions, church ceremonies, and even the law of Moses are things that exist outside of Christ — and therefore they contribute nothing to righteousness before God. We may use them as good and useful things, in their proper place and time. But when the question is justification, they count for nothing — and in fact they do great harm.

By these two things — circumcision and uncircumcision — Paul sweeps away everything else and declares that none of it counts for anything in Christ Jesus, meaning in the matter of faith and salvation. He is using a part to represent the whole: by 'uncircumcision' he means all the Gentiles, and by 'circumcision' he means all the Jews together with all their achievements and all their glory. He is

saying: whatever the Gentiles can contribute with all their wisdom, righteousness, laws, power, kingdoms, and empires — it counts for nothing in Christ Jesus. Whatever the Jews can contribute with Moses, the law, circumcision, their worship, their temple, their kingdom, and their priesthood — it counts for nothing. Therefore in Christ Jesus — in the matter of justification — we must not discuss the laws of either the Gentiles or the Jews. We must simply declare that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything.

Are laws then worthless? Not at all. They are good and useful — but in their proper place and time, meaning in physical and civil affairs, which cannot be managed without laws. We also use certain ceremonies and regulations in the churches — not because keeping them contributes to righteousness, but for good order, as an example to others, for peace, and for harmony, in keeping with the principle: 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' But if laws are set forward and enforced as though keeping them justifies a person, or breaking them condemns him, then they must be removed and abolished — for then Christ loses His office and His glory, since He alone justifies us and gives us the Holy Spirit. The apostle therefore states plainly that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything — only the new creation. Since neither the laws of the Gentiles nor the Jews count for anything, the pope acted most wickedly by compelling people to keep his laws as though their righteousness depended on it.

A new creation — one in which the image of God is restored — is not produced by any outward performance or imitation of good works (for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything). It is produced by Christ, through whom we

are created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. When works are performed, they produce a new outward appearance that pleases the world and the flesh — but not a new creation. The heart remains as wicked as before, full of contempt for God and unbelief. A new creation is therefore the work of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses our hearts through faith, produces the fear of God, love, purity, and other Christian virtues, and gives power to restrain the flesh and to reject the world's righteousness and wisdom. This is not an outward performance — it is a genuine inward transformation. An entirely different sense and judgment is created — altogether spiritual — which recoils from the very things it previously prized most highly. The monastic life and its religious orders once had such a hold on us that we thought there was no other path to salvation. Now we see it entirely differently. We are ashamed of the things we once adored as the most heavenly and holy, before we were born again as this new creation.

The new creation is not produced by changing one's clothing or other outward things, as the monks imagine. It is the renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit — and following this inner renewal comes a change in the faculties and senses of the whole body. When the heart has received new light, new judgment, and new impulses through the Gospel, the inward senses are also renewed: the ears desire to hear the word of God rather than human traditions and fantasies. The mouth and tongue no longer boast of personal achievements, righteousness, and rules — they proclaim only the mercy of God offered to us in Christ. These changes are not merely verbal — they are effective and real, producing a new spirit, a new will, new senses, and new ways of living, so that the eyes, ears, mouth, and tongue not only see, hear, and speak differently

than before, but the mind also approves, loves, and pursues an altogether different thing. Formerly, blinded by the errors and darkness of the papacy, the mind imagined God to be a merchant who would sell His grace in exchange for our works and merits. But now in the light of the Gospel, it is assured that we are counted righteous by faith in Christ alone. It therefore rejects all self-willed works and carries out instead the works of love and of the calling God has commanded. It praises and magnifies God — it rejoices and glories in trusting solely in God's mercy through Jesus Christ. When it must endure trouble or affliction, it bears it cheerfully and willingly, even when the flesh resists and complains. This is what Paul calls a new creation.

Verse 16. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.

Paul adds this as a conclusion. The one true rule we must follow is the new creation — which is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but the new person created in God's image in righteousness and true holiness, inwardly righteous in spirit and outwardly holy and clean in body. The monks also have a kind of righteousness and holiness — but it is hypocritical and corrupt, because they hope to be justified not by faith in Christ alone but by keeping their Rule. Furthermore, even though they maintain an outward holiness — restraining their eyes, hands, tongue, and other bodily members from evil — their hearts remain unclean, full of foul desire, envy, anger, lust, idolatry, contempt and hatred of God, and blasphemy against Christ. They are in fact bitter and hostile enemies of the truth. The monks' Rule and religion is therefore wicked and accursed by God.

But the rule Paul speaks of here is blessed — the rule by which we live by faith in Christ and are made new creatures, truly righteous and holy through the Holy Spirit, without any pretense or performance. To those who walk by this rule belong peace — meaning God's favor, forgiveness of sins, and quietness of conscience — and mercy — meaning help in afflictions and pardon for the remnants of sin that remain in our flesh. And even if those who walk by this rule are ever overtaken by sin, they are still children of grace and peace, and mercy upholds them so that their sin and failure will not be held against them.

Verse 16. And upon the Israel of God.

Here Paul takes aim at the false apostles and the Jews who gloried in their ancestors, boasted of being God's people, and prided themselves on possessing the law. What he means is this: the true Israel of God are those who, like faithful Abraham, believe the promises of God already offered in Christ — whether they are Jews or Gentiles — not those who are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by physical descent. This matter was treated thoroughly in chapter 3.

Verse 17. From now on let no one cause trouble for me.

He closes his letter with a kind of holy indignation. He means: I have faithfully taught the Gospel exactly as I received it through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Whoever will not follow it may follow what he likes — but let him trouble me no more. This is my final verdict: Christ, whom I have preached, is the one and only High Priest and Savior of the world. Either let the world walk according to the rule I have set out here and throughout this entire letter — or let it perish forever.

Verse 17. For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

The true meaning of this passage is this: the marks on my body make it plain enough whose servant I am. If I were seeking to please people — requiring circumcision and law-keeping as necessary for salvation and glorying in your outward observance as the false apostles do — I would have no need to carry these marks. But because I am the servant of Jesus Christ and walk by the true rule — openly teaching and declaring that no one can receive God's favor, righteousness, and salvation except through Christ alone — I must bear the marks of Christ my Lord. These are not marks I chose or sought out. They have been forced on me against my will by the world and the devil, for no other reason than that I preach Jesus as the Christ.

By 'marks' he means the beatings and sufferings he bore in his body, as well as the devil's fiery arrows, anguish and terror of spirit, and the rest. He refers to these sufferings throughout his letters, as Luke does in Acts. 'I think,' he says, 'that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, as those condemned to die — for we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to people.' And again: 'To this very hour we are hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, and we work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we speak kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world.' And elsewhere: 'In great endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in labors, in sleepless nights, in hunger.' And again: 'In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews the

forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers from false brothers.'

These are the true marks and branded signs the apostle speaks of here. We also bear such marks in our bodies today, by God's grace, for Christ's sake. The world persecutes and kills us; false brothers hate us with a bitter hatred; Satan terrifies us inwardly with his fiery arrows — all because we teach that Christ is our righteousness and our life. We did not choose these marks out of any devotion, and we do not welcome the suffering they bring. But because the world and the devil lay them on us for Christ's sake, we are compelled to bear them — and we rejoice in spirit with Paul, who always willingly accepts them, glories in them, and is glad to carry them in his body, for they are a seal and a sure testimony of true doctrine and faith. These words Paul spoke, as I noted before, with a kind of holy displeasure and indignation.

Verse 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

This is his final farewell. He ends the letter with the same theme with which he began. He means: I have taught you Christ purely. I have appealed to you, I have rebuked you, and I have left out nothing I thought would be of benefit to you. There is nothing more I can say, except that I pray with all my heart that our Lord Jesus Christ would bless and extend the work I have done, and govern you by His Holy Spirit forever.

This completes the exposition of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The Lord Jesus Christ — our justifier and Savior — who gave me the grace and ability to expound this letter, and gave you the grace to hear it, preserve and establish both you and me, as I most earnestly desire: that growing daily in the knowledge of His grace and in sincere faith, we may be found blameless and without fault on the day of our redemption. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1 — To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Thanks for Reading

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